Troubling the Line: Exploring the Discursive Construction of Trans Masculinity

BY

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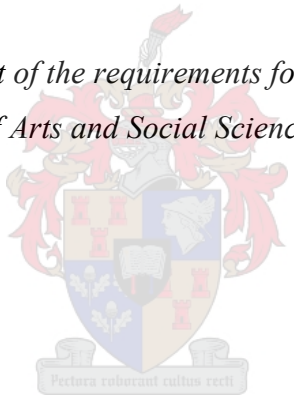

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Professor Dennis Francis

DECLARATION

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Umbulelo omkhulu kooNkala, ooVumisa, Mphanjana, Mbizana!
Camagu!

Abstract

This thesis is an exploratory study that looks into the discursive construction of trans masculinity. The data for this study emanates from semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with seven self-identified trans masculine individuals who live in Cape Town, South Africa. Two methods of data analysis were used; within-case and cross-case analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis. The analysis showed three dominant discourses that trans masculine individuals cite to construct and understand their gender: the discourse of 'gender-specific bodies'; medical transitioning discourse; and counter patriarchal masculinities discourse. The study therefore shows how trans masculine individuals cite competing and dominant discourses to construct masculine subject positions that affirm and validate their masculinity. The findings demonstrate that drawing from dominant discourses of gender allows trans masculine individuals to simultaneously source normative ideas of masculinity while troubling the very assumptions of those knowledges. In addition, the study shows how dominant discourse of masculinity constrict and limit the liveability of trans masculine subjectivity and how trans masculinity is negotiated at the limits of patriarchal contours of masculinity. Further, drawing from experiences of being socialised into cis-heteropatriarchal gender norms the participants in this study reject stereotypical configurations of masculinity and create masculine subject positions that are cognisant of the hierarchical and relational construction of gender. To this end, I argue that trans masculinity is constructed through multiple discourses that shape different and complex modes of masculine embodiment and reveals the fluidity of gender identity and expression.

oh
friends, my friends—
bloom how you must, wild
until we are free.
(Cameron Awkward-Rich, Cento Between the Ending and the End)

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1. Introduction: Researching Trans Masculinity

This thesis is a qualitative exploration of how discourses of gender influence and shape the construction of trans masculinity. Examining the discourses of gender, I show how trans masculine individuals cite various powerful and competing discourses to construct masculine subject positions that affirm and validate their masculinity. Central to this study is the productive power of gender discourses and other interlocking discourses of identity in the construction and constitution of trans masculinity. In this study, discourse is understood as "consisting of related statements which cohere in some ways to produce both meanings and effects in the real world" (Carabine, 2001:268). Discourses are powerful regulatory regimes of knowledge that construct intelligible subjects through various discursive practices. Gender discourses are not taken to be totalising but understood as "a multiplicity of discursive elements that come into play in various strategies" (Foucault, 1978:100). Gender discourses shape the landscape of gender knowledges and influence how we think and make sense of gender.

With this in mind, I would like to turn the focus to two concepts, sex and gender, that are essential to understanding the ontological persuasions of this thesis. Renée DePalma (2013:5) reminds us that "the diversity of human experience is based on complex co-relations among a wide range of physical characteristics that are socially streamlined into 'male' and 'female'". The stabilisation or 'fixing' of sex is a mechanism to discipline bodies; to compel the specific appearances of bodies and punish or 'correct' bodies that appear outside of this understanding of gender, for instance, intersex bodies (Bauer, Truffer and Crocetti, 2019). DePalma (2013:5) argues that:

> Biological characteristics are squeezed into oppositional ideals of male and female to make "neat" categories that define what it means to be a woman and what it means to be a man. (DePalma, 2013:5)

Gender is intricately tied to the imaginary of sex as biology; sex regulates how gender is conceptualised and how bodies appear. Sex and gender thus operate as a disciplining mechanism through the body, where the body is both a site of sex and gender inscription. Dominant discourses of human biology construct sex and gender as linear and co-dependent and thus dictate how bodies ought to appear as either male or female. Individuals whose sex characteristics deviate from the normative male or female are often met with the intensity of regulatory powers that seek to re-

align them to intelligible cultural markers of either, female or male sex characteristics. For example, in the case of intersex children, surgeries often are performed to "correct" the appearance of genitals to look like the normative 'male' or 'female' genitalia (Bauer, Truffer and Crocetti, 2019). In this study, I approach the concepts of gender and sex as cultural markers of identity understood through Butler's (1993) concept of gender performativity. Butler (1993:22) asserts that gender performativity is "not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today but is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted; it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self". The sexed and gendered body is made to appear through the repeated performance of cultural markers of femininity or masculinity that make bodies intelligible as either female and thus "women's bodies" or male thus "men's bodies". There are no biological women's or men's bodies; only socio-culturally constructed gender norms that appropriate biological differences and mark the body as belonging either to the female or male sex. It is these markers that determine how a body is invited, made sense of, and reacted to in the social world. The body thus becomes a site of gender performance. The dominant discourses of sex and gender are not, however, uncontested. Foucault (1978) posits that there is certain reciprocity between the subject (the one who becomes) and power. Individuals do not merely take on gender scripts and reproduce them as they are; gender norms are resisted, troubled, and altered. The temporality of gender performativity prompts us to consider "that gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time" (Butler, 1990:22). Gender is not fixed; it cannot be fixed. As such, how gender is performed is continually shifting and changing and is contingent on time and context.

At this juncture, I turn to the subject of this study, trans masculinity and how it is understood. To understand trans masculinity, we need to understand how transgender identity is conceptualised. Before I define the terms, I want to provide a caveat of some sorts to note that the terms transgender and transmasculine were developed from European and American theoretical and empirical scholarship. Francis and Reygan (2016:67) argue that:

> The lack of a clearly articulated Southern theory, and particularly Southern African theory of sexuality (and gender) and related concepts, theorists and researchers run the risk of maintaining the default position of only looking to models and research generated elsewhere to inform praxis in South Africa. (Francis and Reygan, 2016:67)

It is also the case that in this thesis, the terminology drawn upon to articulate genders and sexualities were generated from the confines of North American and European scholarship. Nevertheless, the literature on transgender in South Africa has embraced, as a point of departure, gender concepts which have been instrumental in understanding and articulating counter/anti-normative gender embodiment. The concepts and terms used in this thesis are not applied uncritically; I am aware of their respective genealogies and explain their specific use in this study. Transgender or trans is an umbrella term I use that captures the experiences of gender embodiment that transgress, challenge or align with the binary conceptualisation of gender. The term transgender has been used as a collective term to denote the "wide range of histories and experiences of individuals whose sense of self does not conform to the gender assigned to them at birth" (Carrera, DePalma, and Lameiras, 2012:667). Transgender people may or may not seek to alter their physical appearance to conform to their felt gender embodiment. Transgender people have been widely understood through the streamlined categories of either binary aligned transgender women or transgender men. Transgender people may self-identify with a variety of terms that reflect the fluidity and complexity of gender. Transgender dislocates the naturalised sex-gender binary system and take on gender identities that often do not cohere with the genders they were assigned at birth.

Transgender subjectivities are not sequestered to the realm of performance (as in drag), but articulate gender embodiment that brings into question the purported 'nature' of gender as something one is born with and thus unchanging. People who are transgender could describe themselves as men or women or resist binary categorisation altogether – but in doing either they queer the dominant relationship of sexed body and gendered subject (Stryker, Currah, and Moore, 2008). Trans masculine is one example of a term that transgender people may self-identify with. Throughout this study, I use the term trans masculine to refer to a broad array of gender identities and articulations of masculinity that fall outside of the strict cis-gender binary of cis-male masculinity. In particular, the trans masculine individuals in this study identify as either trans men or non-binary masculine individuals. These two categories are a fraction of the range of identities that are captured by the term trans masculinity.

Trans masculinity, as a category of identity, holds significant importance for study in South Africa. Studies on masculinities in South Africa (see: Morrell, 1998; Ratele, 2008; Msibi, 2009, Moolman, 2013) have mainly focused on cisgender masculinities, using masculinities

interchangeably with 'men' and 'male', thereby reinforcing constructions of masculinity as a cisgender male prerogative. Similarly, transgender scholarship has sparsely explored trans masculine identities (I expand on this argument in chapter 2). As such, I argue that the debate around masculinities and transgender identities in South Africa must be expanded and include the diversity of masculinities including trans masculinities and to engage the challenge of the counter-discourses of masculinities and their influence on (re)inventing masculinities outside the essentialising conceptions and articulations of masculinities (see: Helman and Ratele, 2018).

Contextualising (Trans)Gender in South Africa

South African society is riddled with contradictions, violence and inequality. Robert Morrell, Jewkes and Lindegger (2012:25) write that South African society is gripped by patriarchal belief systems that are coupled with high instances of violence, stark gender inequalities and perpetual racism. Patriarchal discourses shape the landscape of gender and shape the lived realities of counter-normative gender and sexuality subjectivities. Masculinities scholar, Kopano Ratele (2005:33) writes that the "affective, cognitive and practical imaginary of South African society shapes how people interact and relate to each other". It has been widely reported that gay and lesbian people in South Africa experience heightened threats and acts of homophobic violence (Rothmann and Simmonds, 2015; Msibi, 2012; Swarr, 2012b; Butler, Alpaslan, Strümpher, and Astbury, 2003). Homophobic violence is intricately tied to the policing of gender expression, particularly of gender non-conforming lesbians who are seen to challenge the dominance of masculinity or men (Swarr, 2012b; Nath, 2011). Gender diversity is policed through the popular patriarchal gender discourse that constructs specific roles and behaviours that men and women ought to embody.

Gender non-conformity in South Africa has been historically bound up with political and cultural ideas about gender binaries which saw the Apartheid government's repression of 'undesirable' gender and sexualities (Swarr, 2012a). Through the increasing political voice of the gay and lesbian campaigning of the 1990s and early 2000s (Croucher, 2002), gender and sexuality diversity entered this socio-political space as an important issue of recognition and human rights. The concept of gender non-normativity played a significant role in the fight against discrimination based on gender and sexuality (Gala Archives, 2013). In the course of the transition to democracy, gay and lesbian campaigning utilised a conceptualisation of gender that emphasised an inherent or

innate notion of gender that is fixed within the individual (Swarr, 2012a:52). The political currency of this definition was in that conservative groups could not argue against people who were 'born' as either gay or lesbian; there could only be little argument against what is perceived to be 'natural' (Swarr, 2012a). The understanding of gender as a binary and 'inherent' identity still lingers in current perceptions of transgender identities in South Africa. Transgender subjectivity is oft reduced to pragmatic questions of legality and healthcare. A significant number of counter-normative or transgender narratives in South Africa draw heavily from medical research (psychiatry and endocrinology) and psychology (Nduna, 2012; Newman-Valentine and Duma, 2014; Müller, 2017). Current scholarship on transgender identity is saturated with the medical discourses of transgender identity that often pathologise transgender subjectivity. Medical discourses of gender have contributed to the stabilisation of a "wrong body" narrative of transgender people, while reluctantly poking at the stability of current gender norms.

Similarly, transgender scholarship often centres the question of the physical embodiment of gender and a quest to discover the "truth" of gender which does little but to re-align transgender narratives with the binary idea of gender and avoid questions of the complexities of trans identities as experienced and navigated by trans individuals. The richness and depth of transgender subjectivity are reduced to an oversimplification of transition as a kind of 'becoming normal' narrative that permeates South African society's understanding of transgender. In this study, I argue that it is critical to question the abiding binary construction of gender, which makes it challenging to understand gender beyond the man or woman categories.

The present study: a note on method

In this section, I present the methodology followed in this study to situate the research design, participant selection, data collection and analysis, and to introduce the participants in this study. I wanted to introduce methodology in this introductory chapter to introduce the participants who are central to this study; to ground the modes and forms of subjectivity at the centre of this thesis. Further, I wanted to begin this conversation by framing the epistemologies that frame this fairly exploratory study. This study is premised upon poststructuralist construction of identity that considers that identity is a continuous, multiple, diverse, fluid shifting and contradictory process (Belsey, 1980:132). Post-structuralism holds that individuals are not uniquely positioned but are produced as a "nexus of subjectivities" (Walkerdine, 1990:2-3). As mentioned in the opening

paragraph of this thesis, the study presented here is a qualitative exploration of the discourses shaping trans masculine embodiment, as such I use qualitative research design to understand and explain the meaning and conceptualisations of trans masculinity (Merriam, 1998:3). The key concern in qualitative research, Merriam (1998) argues, is to "understand the phenomena of interest from the participants perspective". As such, the primary research question guiding this study asks; how do young (18-35 year olds), self-identified trans masculine individuals living in or around Cape Town understand and perform masculinity? Four critical questions support the primary question:

1. How do trans masculine individuals understand and perform gender?
2. How do socio-cultural constructions of gender influence their understanding and performance of gender?
3. How do trans masculine individuals navigate and negotiate their trans masculinities?
4. Given the pathological framing of transgender individuals, what according to trans masculine individuals is positive about their lives?

The participants: recruitment and selection

For sampling purposes, the study used a purposeful selection. I used purposeful sampling to "discover, understand and gain insight" (Merriam, 1998:61) on the discursive construction of trans masculinity. Thus, the logic of purposive selection lies in selecting information-rich participants, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008; Merriam, 2002:12). The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question (Merriam, 1998). Selection instead of sampling is used to counter the implication of a sample as representative of a population; the findings from a sample carry "the connotation that those chosen are a sample of a population and the purpose of their selection is to enable conclusions to be applied to a population" (Polkinghorne, 2005:139). Individuals selected for participation in this study are in no way representative of the transmasculine population in South Africa. While the participants come from racially diverse backgrounds, they all live in urban, semi-urban and suburban areas around Cape Town. Eligible participants for this study included people between the ages 18 to 35 years who self-identify as transmasculine and live in or around Cape Town. The age cohort for this study was chosen to

provide understandings of masculinity for individuals who are at different stages in their lives, to account for relatively expansive life experience. The study excludes transgender people assigned male-at-birth who may identify as butch-women or masculine women as the study's focus is specifically trans masculine people who were assigned female at birth.

Qualitative research studies often use small sample sizes; however, there are no specifications on how many participants a study should have as this depends on the qualitative design being used (Merriam, 2002). Using a small number of participants allows the researcher to delve deeper into the experiences and understandings of a phenomenon. The intention was to explore the multiple discourses shaping the understanding and performance of masculinity and how trans masculine individuals cite specific discourses to construct and make sense of masculine subject positions.

To recruit participants for research, I shared the invitation to participate in research through my Facebook account and closed groups on Facebook that I am a part of. I also used snowball sampling , a recruitment strategy that asks members of the studied group to refer individuals from their networks (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016:98). Using Facebook as a recruitment tool has been reported to be an effective instrument for recruiting members of stigmatized social groups (Dalessandro, 2018; Worthen, 2013). Snowball sampling involved asking individuals on my Facebook page to share the research flier and those who participated to share the advertisement with others whom they thought would potentially be interested in participating in the research. In sharing the research flier on social media, I believed it would quickly reach the target participants as 18-24 year olds account for 25.3% of Facebook users in SA and 25-44 year olds account for 34.1% of Facebook users (Clement, 2020). Nevertheless, this was not the case as recruitment is a perennial issue in research. It took longer to get participants for the study and snowball sampling aided the recruitment process; Facebook friends shared the flier and suggested people whom they thought would be interested in taking part in the study. Initially, 12 people responded to the flier, and private messaged me on Facebook. Three of the 12 people were not eligible to participate in the study due to either being located outside of Cape Town or they were older than the required age to participate. Two eligible participants who showed interest in the study and had expressed their desire to take part withdrew from interviewing citing personal reasons; no data had been collected at the time of their withdrawal. In the end, seven self-identified trans masculine individuals took part in the study. A possible reason for the difficulty in reaching an

underrepresented group for research participation could be the uncommon identity terms used in the flier. The term 'trans masculine' is not widely used in trans spaces and public discourse on gender counter-normative subjectivities in South Africa. The more common terms are 'trans man' or 'trans woman'; however, there are trans masculine-identified individuals. In addition, linguistic terms denoting diverse gender identities other than English are not common, as such people who may fall on the trans masculine spectrum could potentially not be aware of the English term or do not identify their gender with the term. As Stryker (2006:14) contends, "transgender is a category of First World origin currently being exported for Third World consumption". Similarly, public discourse on counter-normative gender and sexualities in South Africa is still heavily reliant on the binary conception of gender and sexuality, with transgender also being understood through the logic of a two-gender system. An important contribution to the discourse around gender and sexuality diversity has been the negotiation of positive and affirming linguistic terms to identify counter-normative gender and sexuality identities (Ntsabo, 2018). This move will aid in future research with gender and sexuality diverse groups.

In this section, I provide the profiles of the participants who took part in this study. I chose to provide this profile of participants according to social characteristics such as age, race, and location at the outset of the thesis. I am also cognisant of the complexities behind categorising participants in this way. Note that the terms 'white' and 'black' were racial categories constructed and widely used under the apartheid system in South Africa to classify people according to their 'race' (Posel, 2001). While I acknowledge the problematic nature of these terms, it is necessary to bear in mind the reality of racialisation in South Africa where constructions of race continue to hold social salience and configure identities hierarchically, relationally, and as advantaged or disadvantaged. All seven participants approved of their profiles.

Seth (he/him/his) is a 19-year-old white first-year university student who grew up in the northern suburbs of Cape Town. He self identifies as trans masculine. Seth describes his sexuality as queer and has been in a relationship with a cisgender queer woman for four years.

Karabo (he/him/his) is a 32-year-old black transgender man who grew up in Johannesburg. Karabo describes his sexuality as heterosexual and has been in a relationship for eight years, and lives in Cape Town.

Buhle (he/him/his) is a 23-year-old black transgender man who grew up in Mthatha, in the Eastern Cape. Buhle describes his sexuality as heterosexual and has been in a relationship with a

cisgender identified heterosexual woman for three years. Buhle lives in the South Peninsula of Cape Town.

Luke (he/him/his) is a 29-year-old white transgender man who grew up and lives in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town. Luke does not label his sexuality.

Mike*[1] (he/him/his) is a 27-year-old transgender man who grew up in Johannesburg and now lives in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town. Mike* describes his sexuality as queer and has been in a relationship with a transgender woman for three months.

Lee (they/them/their) is a 23-year-old black non-binary first-year university student who grew up in a township in Cape Town and now lives in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town. Lee describes their sexuality as queer and lives with their partner.

Henry (they/them/their) is a 28-year-old black non-binary person who grew up in the Southern suburbs of Cape Town. Henry works in finance and has been in a relationship with a cisgender queer woman for three years.

The interview context

When I initially began thinking about this study and writing the research proposal, I considered making use of individual interviews and focus group discussions to 'observe' how participants construct, express, defend and sometimes modify their views in the context of discussion and debate with others (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). However, the idea of using focus groups proved to be an impossibility owing to logistical failures; the participants in this study had different time schedules and commitments that could not be reconciled. As indicated in the previous section, seven trans masculine-identified individuals participated in this study. The data set used in this study emanate from seven individual, face-to-face, in-depth semi-structured interviews I conducted between October 2018 and February 2019. The focus of the interviews was to generate descriptive, comprehensive, and nuanced accounts of how masculinity is understood and performed. I developed an interview schedule that included semi-structured and open-ended questions intended to elicit various understandings, interpretations and explanations from the participants allowing a flexible yet guided conversation (Merriam, 2009). The interview schedule focused on contextual, demographic, and perceptual information. Demographic information is participant profile information that describes who the participants in the study are – where they

[1] Pseudonym chosen by the participant.

come from, some of their background, education, and personal information such as age, gender, and race. Perceptual information relies on interviews to uncover participants' descriptions of their experiences. Perceptual information relates to how experiences influence decisions they made, whether participants have a change of mind or a shift in attitude, and whether they describe more of the constancy of purpose (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008).

The structure and entry points of the interviews varied for each participant. For example, the interviews took on a conversational style and would begin by talking in general about who we (the participant and myself) are, talk about relationships, current affairs, music and the like. The interviews provided a space for the participants to explore their grappling with and reflect on issues relating primarily to gender embodiment. In this instance, the participants reflected on their understandings of masculinity and drew from different discourses that shape their masculinity; highlighting the different ways in which they as individuals are positioned by various discourse that shape who they are and whom they become. Furthermore, working with spoken narratives made space for individuals to reflect on and make sense of the many ways in which we are positioned and how they navigate a meaningful and livable masculine positionality that aligns with whom they feel themselves to be. The narratives presented in this study revealed a layered and textured complexity demonstrating how transmasculine individuals mediate, create, influence, resist and challenge gender norms. Whether contemplating concepts of gender fluidity, class, race, transphobia, the tyranny of gender norms, recognition, and affirmation, the trans masculine individuals in this study complicate the oversimplification of gender identity and bring to bear the complex way in which self-reflexivity and agency is navigated.

It is important to note that interviews themselves are discursive events; they are "finite and limited" to the moment and conditions of their occurrence. The interview moment is shaped by the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. As such, I approached the interviews as collaborative meaning-making events in and of themselves rather than objective, value-free instances of information recollection and extraction.

Further, the interview context is a site of (re)production of identities; a site in which I, as the researcher, together with the participant, enter with socially constructed identities and knowledges. As such, I argue that to some extent the interview context provides, for the participant, opportunities for 'becoming' or embodying a particular kind of masculinity in the moment of the interview in relation to the interviewer, place of the interview, and the topic of masculinity itself.

The participants articulated themselves in a combination of English, IsiXhosa and IsiZulu, which allowed them to share nuanced and rich articulations of their life stories. Having full proficiency of all three languages allowed me to probe into the metaphors and allegories that the participants shared and the hidden meanings behind them. Translations of the data are marked by square brackets [].

In the research proposal and consent form, I indicated that the interviews would take place in a public space (for instance, at a coffee shop). However, the interview locations ranged from the participants' homes which they invited me to, the beach, the library, and queer bars and restaurants. In two instances, the participants requested to have their partners sit in on the interviews for support as they knew their journeys more intimately and could offer some perspective; the partners did not contribute to the interview data. My priority during the interviews was to ensure that the participants were comfortable enough to have an in-depth conversation about their lives and were in a space that they deemed safe for them to have such a conversation with me. I found that although the interviews were semi-structured and could have had a formal feel about them, the choice of space made the interviews 'less formal' but retained the structure. In three instances, the participants spoke for longer than the agreed-upon one hour. Even after I had alerted them to the time, as a courtesy, they asked to continue. Some participants shared that they appreciated the space to speak about their journey and two remarked that the interviews had 'saved them some therapy hours' and made them think about aspects of their identities that they did not think of before.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of making sense of the data and involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and answering your research questions (Merriam, 2009:175-176). Data analysis began simultaneously with the first interview, which I transcribed on the day it was recorded. Emerging insights and hunches from previous interviews directed the interviews that followed to allow for a focused data collection (Merriam, 2009:165). The analysis focused on the seven interviews and utilised two methods of data analysis; within-case and cross-case analysis and Foucauldian discourse analysis.

Within-case and cross-case analysis

In a multi-case analysis, there are two stages of analysis – the within-case analysis and the cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2009:204). I began with within-case analyses that focused on reading and rereading individual interviews, separately and assigned descriptive codes to the excerpts that spoke to the research questions (Merriam, 2009). The descriptive codes allowed me to create categories that I collapsed into themes that focus on specific research questions (Merriam, 2009:179). Once the within-case process was completed, I began cross-case analysis. A cross-case analysis is a process where the researcher analyses the data across the individual participants to develop thematical generalisations among individual participants to describe the participants as a group in relation to the research question (Merriam, 2009). In the cross-case analysis I cross-referenced the themes that emerged from each participant interview to develop a deeper understanding of the cases as a whole. A cross-case analysis is appropriate in order to develop a generalisation among the seven individuals to describe the collective themes prominent in each of the case (Merriam, 2009). Through a collapsing, integrating, and sorting the themes that appear across the seven interviews, three prominent themes, with sub-themes, that illustrated the conceptualisation and performance of trans masculinity emerged.

Foucauldian discourse analysis

The emergent themes were further analysed through the lens of Foucauldian discourse analysis drawing from the interlocking concepts, discourse, power/knowledge, and normalisation. According to Foucault (1980), power operates through multiple discourses that are taken up by individuals in various ways. Discourses determine the norms that govern ideas around what is 'normal' and 'abnormal', 'right' or 'wrong' (Carabine, 2001). Discourses of gender structure the way gender subjectivities are perceived, understood, and how they appear; they shape the knowledges that construct 'normalcy' or 'difference'. Discourse has the power to legitimise knowledges that are constructed as 'truths' about phenomena. Hence discourse has the power to regulate and also discipline individuals into 'normalising' and accepting social norms – normalisation is one mechanism through which power is disseminated (Barker, 2012; Carabine, 2001). In this part of the analysis, I followed Carabine's (2001:281) guide to doing Foucauldian discourse analysis I read the collated themes paying attention to how trans masculinity is 'spoken of', to map the commonalities in the knowledges drawn from by the participants. Three prominent discourses emerged from this process; the first concerns the 'gender-specific bodies' discourse;

the medical transitioning discourse and thirdly; counter patriarchal discourses. The three dominant discourses provide the trans masculine individuals with sense-making practices with which to understand the social reality they are experiencing and participating in.

Further, I looked for evidence of inter-relationship within and across the three discourses and identified the discursive strategies used to validate particular knowledges as the 'truth' about trans masculinity. I also looked for silences and counter-discourses that were implicated in the construction of trans masculinity. Lastly, I identified the effects and implications of the three discourses of gender that emerged in the construction and performance of trans masculinity.

The present study is explorative, as such the utilisation of within-case and cross-case analysis together with Foucauldian discourse analysis was to allow for an analysis that tracks the emergent dominant themes within the data and the patterns that emerge in the data that point to prominent discourses that shape how gender is understood, normalised and disciplined. I've also applied Foucauldian discourse analysis to track the discourses trans masculine individuals cite to make sense of their masculinity and what these knowledges reinforce or legitimate around ideas of normative masculinities. Popular discourses of gender have the power to regulate and discipline individuals into accepting 'normal' enunciations and embodiments of gender. The participants in this study drew from, challenged and at times rejected the popular discourses of gender.

Research integrity

Within qualitative research, post-structuralist researchers investigate the productive interfaces between knowledge/power and identity with cognisance of the localness of knowledge, which limits validity (Hughes, 2001). Qualitative methodologies are concerned with deepening analysis and with how participants make sense of the world within multiple contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1986). Qualitative researchers are more focused on the 'evolving relationship' with the data; they appreciate that results may differ according to researcher and method and they question goals such as replication as potentially obscuring existing diversity (Neuman, 2006:170-171). Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggest 'trustworthiness' to argue that for research to be credible and authentic, its methodology and analysis should be underpinned by a sound rationale, as demonstrated in the methodology section of this opening chapter. Validity and reliability are enhanced by self-reflexivity (see page 20) and rich, thick descriptions to present evidence, clarification of the researcher's bias triangulation which contextualises the researcher's analysis (Wetherell and

Potter, 1988). In addition, Polkinghorne (2005:140) argues that "multiple participants serve as a kind of triangulation on the experience, locating its core meaning by approaching it through different accounts. Triangulation does not serve to verify a particular account but to allow the researcher to move beyond a single view of the experience. The findings in this study are anchored in the data — the analysis accounts to the specific discourses that emerge from what was said by the participants in the interviews.

Reliability is advanced with the recording of interviews. Interview answers are analysed as units of discourse, not as facts about how users think or behave. Participants' accounts were examined not only from the point of view of their content and meaning but also their implications and effects in constructing different versions of reality. The reliability of research results does not depend on the trustworthiness of participants answers, since even a speaker who lies applies cultural forms and interpretive resources which, in themselves, are neither true nor false, but exist (Silverman, 1985). All forms of talk and texts represent situated speech which provides evidence of the various ways in which a particular phenomenon can be approached. Validity is understood to be about authenticity, that is, that the research is providing an equitable account of social life (Neuman, 2006:171). The reliability of findings depends on the verifiability of the researcher's interpretations. The interpretations must, in a consistent and identifiable way, be based on the research data, as is in this study.

Ethics

Following the Stellenbosch University's Human Research Ethics and International Sociological Association code of ethics, the research was guided by an ethical approach based on transparency, quality, and honesty conducted with scholarly integrity, social sensitivity, and responsibility. The study received ethical clearance from the REC humanities at Stellenbosch University. Participants recruited to take part in this study were briefed about the aims of the research upon approach. After agreeing to participate, the participants were provided with a consent form which outlines the objectives of the study, possible risks of participating in the study, their right to withdraw, and protection of their information, confidentiality, and identity. The use of pseudonyms ensured anonymity. Some of the research participants required that they be identifiable, through their names, in the written-up report, as such, I uphold their right to be identified in the study. Pseudonyms, chosen by participants, are marked by an asterisk (*). All

names of third parties and places referred to in the data are anonymised through the use of pseudonyms or left out altogether.

A note on terminology

Throughout this study, I use queer in three ways: queer (as a noun or adjective) to describe genders and sexuality identities other than cisgender and heterosexuality. I am aware of the historical implication of the word queer and that not all people who identify with genders or sexualities other than cis- or heterosexuality use the word queer. I am using this term critically not to assume any homogeneity or stability of these identities. I also use queer as a verb, to refer to what Renée DePalma (2013:1) states is "a process of consciously engaging in troubling, transgressing normative categories or associations recognising and critiquing the social processes behind what feels natural, or simply refusing to believe in these categories". Recognising the links between gender normativity and heteronormativity requires us to address the extent to which the policing of sex and gender function to construct gender anxiety and cissexual privilege (DePalma, 2013:2). An exploration of transgender subjectivity provides a crucial dimension to queer politics; it explores ways of marginalisation that are specific to our assumptions of the biological stability of sex-gender categories (DePalma, 2013:2). In the participants' accounts, the following terms are used: Pre-T – denoting a time period before undergoing testosterone therapy; T – referring to testosterone therapy.

Researcher Positionality

Reflexivity is an important part of research; it is necessary that I acknowledge and declare my position in relation to the study. Reflexivity allows a researcher to examine their role and contribution to the construction of meaning in the study (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). Reflexivity also takes into consideration the power imbalance between the researcher and the researched (Ellis and Bochner, 2000). I approach this study as a non-binary masculine black researcher; university educated from a working-class background. Pursuing a study of trans masculinity was inspired partly by the limited scholarly documentation of transgender narratives in South Africa and the seemingly quiet voices of trans masculine-identified people in academia. Trans masculinity plays a significant role in my life; it intersects with my academic research as well as informs the embodied perspective through which I make sense of the world as a non-binary queer masculine person. My scholarship is informed by my identity and how I navigate the world. I am drawn to

scholarship and forms of knowledge that trouble the hegemonic and taken for granted knowledge that shapes identity and how society is organised. These seemingly abstracted characteristics of myself appear to be an ambiguous presentation of who I am; nevertheless, they serve as important metrics that identify my relationship to knowledge, power, and privilege.

I cautiously enter the discussion on trans masculinity, an identity I embody, yet also an identity that is lived and understood in particularly diverse ways. Researching individuals with shared identities and being 'visibly' queer brought some level of comfort for both myself and the participants in the interviews. It became clear that disclosure of my gender, or the lack thereof, was most often a source of trust that brought relative comfort to the participants, enabling them to share intimate details of their lives with me in the interviews. Before starting the interviews, I was concerned by whether or not this presumed level of comfort would negatively impact the information shared in the interviews, in that I would overlook or take for granted some aspects of the inquiry or fail to follow up on 'obvious' statements.

Thesis outline

This thesis is divided into four parts. First, I begin with a comprehensive summary of the relevant literature on trans masculinity scholarship drawing from international and local research to situate the current study in trans masculinity scholarship in chapter two. In chapter three I present the theoretical foundations of this study, drawing from queer theory, queer phenomenology, and the concept of 'sticky' masculinity through which masculinity is understood as the sticking of masculine behaviours over time. Chapter four presents the findings and analysis that answer the research questions through engaging with the participants' narratives and teasing out the emerging discourses of gender that influence and shape the construction and constitution of trans masculinity. Lastly, the conclusion, in chapter five, brings the study to a close by highlighting the important insights this study has illuminated.

2. Locating Trans Masculinity – A Literature Review

International scholarly work on transgender men and trans masculinity has been growing steadily in the past few years (Green, 2005; Rubin, 2003; Schilt and Windsor, 2014; Baker, 2018; Aboim, 2016). Men and masculinity studies, however, has not paid sufficient attention to trans masculinity in order to further understand and develop a more in-depth analysis of masculinity that is not contingent of the idea of masculinity as something that cisgender men do (Gottzen and Straube, 2017). Critiquing this silence on trans masculinity, Sofia Aboim (2016:226) writes that the continued silence in Critical studies on men and masculinities (CSMM hereafter) is underpinned by the assumption that:

> trans men occupy a 'no man's land' as they seem neither relevant for transgressing the boundaries of male privilege and changing the order of masculine domination nor are important enough to assess the trappings of that same privilege or dividend. (Aboim, 2016:226)

Further, Aboim (2016) argues that trans men "have also received less attention in transgender studies when compared to their female counterparts, who have gained far more visibility". In a 2017 special issue on Trans-masculinities for *NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies,* editors Lucas Gottzén and Wibke Straube (2017:217) wrote about the need for a "dialogue between masculinity studies and transgender studies in order to find common areas of inquiry and mutual knowledge production". It is also the case that in South African research on masculinity, the focus has been on cisgender male masculinity which conceals the existence of non-cisgender male masculinities. As Eve Sedgwick (1995:12) remarked: "it is important to drive a wedge between masculinity and men" to decentre the conflation of masculinity with men. Expanding the debate around masculinities to include as many subjects as possible will aid to develop a broader and in-depth understanding of masculinity. The present literature review chapter maps the scholarly terrain of trans masculinity literature emanating both from North America, Asia, the Middle East and South Africa contexts. The chapter begins with a summary of selected international scholarship that focuses specifically on trans masculinity. Following this discussion is an engagement with transgender scholarship in South Africa, highlighting the dominant lines of theorising transgender identity through legal, medical and identity work and provides a critical discussion of the dominant sites of theorising transgender subjectivity that have shaped how transgender identities are understood. The final part of this chapter, drawing from the literature

engaged with, advances the argument that discourses of cis-normativity and heteronormativity articulated in the literature shape primarily how transgender identity is understood.

Transgender masculinity - an international perspective

As mentioned in the opening discussion to this chapter, international scholarship on masculinity scholarship has focused to a large extent on 'male' masculinities, in this instance 'male' meaning cisgender men (Connell, 1996; Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009; Hearn, 2012). Some research on masculinity has focused on poststructuralist thinking, arguing that masculinities are not monolithic but socially situated and discursively produced (Frosh, Phoenix, and Pattman, 2001; Berggren, 2014). These studies challenge the assumptions of masculinity as monolithic and immutable. The available international scholarship addressing the topic of trans masculinity proceeds the common themes of transgender identity awareness and construction, tracing the emergence of transgender identity. For instance, the empirical literature on transgender men emanating from the USA and Canada focuses on the embodiment of masculinity among transgender men (Jourian, 2017; Nicolazzo, 2016; Stewart, 2017; Peetoom, 2009; Zimman, 2013), self-confidence in transgender identification and gender dysphoria (Catalano, 2015). These studies also focus on how the body is conceived of in relation to masculinity and sexuality and the strategies trans men use to achieve the ideal masculine bodily appearance (Schilt and Windsor, 2014; Bishop, 2016).

Significant research on transgender people has focused on the medical discourse of transgender identity using standardised scales to measure attitudes and beliefs about transgender identities (King, Winter, and Webster, 2009; Chang and Chung, 2015; Campbell, Hinton, and Anderson, 2019). Transgender studies also focus on the healthcare needs of the transgender population (Jones et al., 2019; Kanj et al., 2019) charting the various medical procedures that transgender people undergo to bring their bodies closer to their sense of self.

Conceptually, there have been a few studies that have specifically explored the varied meanings and experiences that are can be captured by or transcend the term trans masculinity. For example, in an ethnographic study exploring "gender variance in the central highlands of Vietnam", Huong Thu Nguyen (2016) discusses the lived experiences of a masculine performing individual (assigned female at birth) whose gender characteristics blur the boundaries between lesbian and transgender. Nguyen (2016) draws from an ethnographic vignette of a 53-year-old

member of the Bahnar, an ethnic minority group living in the central highlands of Vietnam. Nguyen (2016:266) found that the "Bahnar expression '*Bóngai para ko le ol'* encompasses aspects of hermaphroditism, cross-dressing and masculinity thus showing that these diverse subjectivities do not fit any conventional western category". Nguyen (2016) also shows that the experience and performance of masculinity in the Vietnam context she studied transcends the gender terms currently used in the English-speaking world to articulate masculinity embodied by non-trans male individuals.

Researching trans masculinity in Iran, Zara Saeidzadeh (2019:12) explores how Iranian trans men construct themselves as manlier by criticising what they term 'natural men'. Saeidzadeh (2019:12) found that the trans men in her study "embody a complex form of masculinity in that they problematize patriarchal cultural values that feed into the creation of phallocentric masculinity; while at the same time abiding by a traditional heterosexual form of masculinity". The study (Saeidzadeh, 2019:12) also found that "the trans men who went through surgical transitions embody a distinct form of masculinity in that they are heterosexual and financially stable; they are good to women, attractive, sensitive, supportive, communicative and caring; but they are also conservative in their attitudes toward sexuality and strict towards women" (Saedzadeh, 2019:12). Further, Seidzadeh (2019:12) argues that the trans men in her study, "who transitioned in a patriarchal gender regimen, appear to result in a more egalitarian approach to women". Saeidzadeh's (2019) study illustrates that the meanings attached to particular forms of trans masculinity are shaped by the dominant gender discourse that the trans masculine individuals are socialised into.

In a qualitative study that explores the conceptions of masculinity among male-identified trans people, Jamison Green (2005) found that the trans men in the study articulated masculinity, not in phallocentric terms but articulated a difference between maleness and masculinity. Green (2005:295) reports that the trans men in his study argued that "maleness and masculinity is not the same thing and that masculinity does not depend on having a male body or having a penis". Green (2005:296) further reports that the trans men in his study reported that "they came to understand their masculinity by being told by people that they were masculine or embodied masculinity, some also articulated feelings of difference that were contrasted with being or feeling like a girl" (2005:296). Also, the participants in Green's (2005:296-297) study drew from stereotypical ideas of how masculinity is expressed, noting that "masculinity is expressed in body language,

behaviour, occupation, speech and cultural stereotypes of appropriate actions for people with male bodies". Furthermore, Green (2005:267) reports that in the study, "the trans men did not worry about being perceived as masculine but worried about being perceived as male where, for example, some early medical transition trans men reported having to deliberately exhibit behaviours designed to communicate masculinity when they were more worried about being perceived as not male in male-dominated spaces, potentially in the workplace or in superficial social exchanges". Green (2005:269) further argues that "the idea in order for trans men to be appropriately interpreted by others as male, then they must know the language of masculinity".

The three studies on trans masculinity drew from above illustrate that there are clear parallels in normative ideas of masculinity embodied by non-trans men and trans men. Masculinity is contextual, and as such, studies exploring how trans masculine individuals understand masculinity need to take into consideration the spatial meanings of masculinity. The language used to articulate masculinity, as Shown in Nguyen (2016) varies from place to place and is contingent on the cultural interpretations of masculinity. It would be beneficial to the study of men and masculinity to explore trans masculinities to expand analyses of the concept of masculinity and the wide array of articulations of masculinity by both trans masculine individuals and non-trans men.

Trans and masculinity - A South African perspective

An attempt at understanding gender subjectivity in South Africa ought to acknowledge the complex and primarily violent patriarchal, racial and heteronormative history of the country. The logic of patriarchy is firmly embedded in the conceptualisation and understanding of gender in South African society. Morrell et al., (2012:25) shows that patriarchal ideas are deeply embedded in the fabric of South African society which is evident in the high instance of gender-based violence, stark gender inequalities and unrelenting racism. Masculinity in South Africa has primarily been explored from conceptions of masculinity as affected by violence (Bhana, 2005), hegemonic masculinity (Morrell, Jewkes and Lindegger, 2012), boys and masculinity (Bhana and Chen, 2019; Shefer et al., 2007; Bhana, 2005) race and class (Moolman, 2013). Constructions of masculinity in South African not only reflect the country's colonial and apartheid eras but are in part the reason for this history (Morrell, 2001). South African research on masculinities also illustrates how economic marginalisation, racial inequalities, the legacies of apartheid, and

continued unemployment and suffering have contributed to the creation of masculinities based on exaggerated forms of heterosexual prowess, violence against women and children, and the repudiation of gay masculinities (Morrell et al., 2012; Msibi, 2012). While there is no one form of "dominant masculinity that serves as a model for all men, it is empirically evident that various racialised forms of masculinity are dominant" (Hamlall, 2018:309). These forms of masculinity inform and shape particular ways of being a man and legitimatize gender discriminatory practices (Jewkes, Sikweyiya, Morrell and Dunkle, 2011). Men across the social spectrum also adopt masculinities that counter-hegemonic practices (Helman and Ratele, 2018). South Africa's history of segregation based on identity and the repression of "undesirable" gender and sexuality identities have influenced how gender is conceptualised and understood (Swarr, 2012a). In South Africa, there is a growing body of work that explores and troubles queer masculinities, a few scholars (Helman and Ratele, 2018; Shefer, Kruger, Schepers, 2015; Tucker, 2009; Ratele, 2008, 2005; Visser, 2008) have written from different perspectives on (queer) masculinities using feminist methodologies and theories.

Transgender scholarship in South Africa

Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual scholarship in South Africa has grown in integrated theoretical and methodological leaps over the past decade, while transgender issues have only recently gained momentum in academic and public discourse on queer genders and sexualities. Research on trans people in South Africa is growing, but it is limited in content, method, and theory. Trans research is usually lumped with LGBT research which includes very few transgender people in their sample (Mavhandu-Mudzisi and Ganga-Limando, 2014). The transgender people included in this research have mostly been included as sub-categories of men who have sex with men (MSM) and, to a lesser extent, women who have sex with women (WSW) (Caceres, Konda, Segura & Lyerla 2008; Richter et al., 2013).

A possible downfall to this research Jobson, Theron, Kaggwa, Kim (2012) argues, is that research that focuses on MSM or WSW may fail to reach transgender individuals who are not linked to these populations social and sexual networks, such as transgender people who completely 'pass' in cis-heterosexual communities, or who are 'stealth' (do not share their trans identity). The assumption that people who self-identify within the LGBT acronym should be considered one sub-population in research is misleading and contributes to the conflation of sex and gender. For

transgender people to be included in the research, research designs and recruitment strategies need to include strategies to target transgender populations explicitly.

The lack of data available on the transgender population exacerbates a limited understanding of the differences within the broad category 'transgender'. On a theoretical level, very few studies on trans in South Africa have critically engaged gender theories to make sense of transgender identity (Van Der Waal, 2016; Francis, 2014). Academic research on transgender identities is underperforming and relies heavily on medical narratives to articulate transgender identity. Outside of academic scholarship, an extensive and diverse discussion on transgender identity in South Africa has come from newspaper publications documenting and reporting on the different aspect of transgender subjectivities in South Africa (Pitt, 2019; Collison, 2018a, 2018b). Nevertheless, the few peer-reviewed studies done on transgender identity in South Africa are thematically discussed in the following section to contextualise the terrain of transgender scholarship and to explore the discussion animating transgender scholarship in South Africa.

Constructing gender nonconformity: A legislation and healthcare perspective

The available scholarship on transgender identity pays attention to the legal and medical perspectives of transgender and gender non-conforming. Transgender identity is made sense of and understood through questions of legality, which intersect with questions of formal identification, changing sex markers on identity documents and the legislation making these processes possible and the complexities thereof. South Africa is the only country in Africa to offer constitutional protection against discrimination based on sex, gender, and sexual orientation (Jurgroop and Ersthuizen, 2016). Transgender people in South Africa are protected by formal rights, as outlined in section 9(3) of the Constitution of the country which speaks against the discrimination of individuals based on, among others, sex, sexual orientation, and gender (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). Transgender people in South Africa are also made provision for by The Alteration of Sex Description and Status Act 49 that allows, under certain conditions, the changing of one's sex recorded in the population registry (Government Gazette, 2004:4). The Alteration of Sex Description and Status Act 49 of 2003 (hereafter Act 49) makes provision for individuals to alter their sex recorded at birth and thus have identification that correctly reflects their gender (Government Gazette, 2004:4). Act 49 is an important milestone in the lobbying for gender equality in South Africa; however, the implementation of the Act has yet

to resonate with the institutions of health and governance fully. For example, a 2017 report by Legal Resources Centre (Rubin, 2017:136) has reported that "transgender individuals seeking to alter their sex description still face many complex channels through home affairs, two of which have been widely communicated; the unjust delayed and improper processing of applications and unfair and baseless rejection". In addition, Rubin (2017:135) also reports that "a significant number of their transgender clients have had to wait between one and seven years for the processing of their applications and upon follow up the applicants find out about lost applications and thus have to resubmit applications". The lack of urgency and negligence by government institutions to implement the provisions of the Alteration of Sex Description and Status Act 49 of 2003 consistently and in a dignified way underscore the lack of concern when it comes to matters of gender diversity.

In a similar vein, the disregard and lack of consistency in the implementation of trans affirmative law, some studies (Newman-Valentine and Duma, 2014) have reported on the complexities surrounding gender-affirming healthcare for transgender people seeking to undergo medical transitioning. Some transgender people seek transitioning services as a vital intervention to affirm identity and alleviate gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is explained as occurring in relation to 'transsexualism and transgenderism' as it is "a potentially life-threatening condition if unresolved" (Pepper, 2015). Gender dysphoria is characterised by a dissociation between an individual's biological or physical sex and their gender identity (Pepper, 2015). The treatment of gender dysphoria usually takes several forms including psychological counselling, hormone therapy and/or gender-affirming surgery. Newman-Valentine and Duma (2014) explored "transsexual women's" journey of sexual realignment through the Western Cape healthcare system. Through in-depth interviews with 10 participants, Newman-Valentine and Duma (2014) found that "health practitioners use their position of power to withhold, delay or prevent the progress of gender affirmative healthcare; they determine the trajectory of the gender affirmation journey". The study reports that participants felt like the doctors were "playing God" when they refused healthcare for transgender patients.

In a study concerning the attitudes of healthcare workers and gender affirmative healthcare, Luvuno, Ncama and Mchunu (2017) found that the healthcare workers interviewed for the study indicated that they had not undergone any formal training on sexual health thus the lack of training combined with the paucity of data on transgender health caused the healthcare workers discomfort

when confronted with gender non-conforming patients. The study further reports that healthcare workers, doctors, and nurses, were more focused on invasive and humiliating questioning, and projecting their prejudiced cultural or religious beliefs on the patients rather than providing quality healthcare and failed to prioritise the well-being of the transgender patient (Luvuno, Ncama and Mchunu, 2017). Furthermore, the study reports that transgender health is not covered in the training of healthcare workers thus knowledge and skills on transgender patient's needs is limited which sometimes led to victim blaming and the transgender patient being called "attention seekers". The issue of the lack of training of healthcare workers on transgender issues has also been covered by Bateman (2011) and Müller (2013) who report that there is a profound silence on gender and sexuality diversity education for healthcare workers in their curricula.

Gender Affirmative Healthcare/technologies of the self

As elaborated on in the discussion above, South African law recognises the right of transgender people to alter their sex description. Further, the provision of gender affirmative healthcare according to recognised national professional guidelines, and in terms of all the provisions set out by the National Department of health, is legal, ethical, and medical practice in South Africa (Wilson, Marais, de Villiers, Addinall, Campbell, 2014:450). Transgender people seeking gender affirmative healthcare in South Africa usually follow a generally recognised process that begins with a clinical assessment in which a mental healthcare professional assesses the individual's gender concerns in accordance with standard criteria (Wilson et al., 2014:450). The mental health professional then presents information regarding possible transition and other possible medical intervention. Endocrine therapy, otherwise known as hormone replacement therapy, is one of the common transitioning routes that trans people seeking transition take. Endocrine therapy involves a rigorous risk evaluation with clinical and laboratory assessment that is followed by the administering of either testosterone (masculinising hormone) or oestrogen (feminising hormone) (Wilson et al., 2014) and is maintained for as long as the patients requires, and others take it throughout their lives, but it differs from person to person. Previously exclusively the domain of the endocrinologist and the mental health specialist, the diagnosis, evaluation, and cross-hormone therapy can now in many cases be managed by a general practitioner competent in gender transition therapy, or consultation with a transgender unit (Wilson et al., 2014:449). Recognising the role of counselling, specifically psychological counselling, in the harm and

marginalisation of sexual and gender diversity groups, the Psychology Association of South Africa developed an "affirmative stance" to guide mental healthcare workers to respect and recognise of the human rights of sexually and gender diverse people, respect and honour self-determination in gender and sexuality issues (Victor, Nel, Lynch and Mbatha, 2013). For transgender people seeking medical transitioning services, the first point of contact is usually a psychologist or therapist.

Writing on medical ethics, Tomson (2018:26) argues that the gatekeeping of access to care by service providers is evident in the instance when the healthcare provider is positioned as the one who makes the assessment of whether or not a patient should be allowed access to gender-affirming care. Tomson (2018:26) vehemently states that "this is a blatant violation of the principle of respect for autonomy". Furthermore, Tomson (2018:26) reiterates that "since access to medical transition improves outcomes for transgender patients, limiting access can be seen as harmful in and of itself, and as such, is a violation of the principle of non-maleficence (medical ethics)". In South Africa, the lack of adequate training of mental health professionals in the subject of gender diversity creates an additional barrier to both access and quality healthcare and has adverse effects for transgender people seeking medical transitioning.

It is reported that in the public sector, there are currently two public transgender clinics in South Africa; one at the Steve Biko Academic Hospital in Pretoria and the other which provides a more comprehensive service at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town (Bateman, 2011; Wilson et al., 2014). The clinics work mainly on referrals from NGOs that work with issues concerning transgender people's well-being. Spencer, Meer and Muller (2017:97) report that healthcare facilities are queerphobic and play on the trope of queer identities as 'un-African' and unpatriotic. Furthermore, the study reports on the ignorance of healthcare workers on queer sexual health needs and vulnerabilities because "they seem unable to conceive of sexual behaviour as anything other than the penis to vagina intercourse" (Spencer et al., 2017: 95). The lack of information on gender and sexuality diversity, insufficient number of health institutions competent in providing gender affirmative healthcare and the transphobia embraced by healthcare workers, as demonstrated in research, has an impact on the health and well-being of transgender patients. Reports of lack of access to appropriate therapies suggest that this may contribute to low self-esteem and poor mental health may increase the likelihood of individuals engaging in risky sexual practices (Jobson et al., 2012). The lack of access to gender affirmative care is exacerbated by lack of information, location

and socio-economic constraints. Jobson et al. (2012) report that access to appropriate hormone therapy and surgery in Africa is very difficult and most transgender people on the continent never get the chance to transition (under supervised medical care). Out of desperation due to the stigma and discrimination transgender people face in healthcare institutions, trans people are more inclined to expose themselves to significant harm in seeking non-conventional treatments (Wilson et al., 2014). It has also been reported that transgender people looking to access healthcare sometimes have to teach the medical professionals on what transgender identity is and how to engage them in a respectful and dignified manner (monakali, 2017).

The medical discourse around transgender identities has a strong presence in the construction and perception of transgender identities in South Africa. There have been powerful movements worldwide calling for the depathologisation of transgender identities. In South Africa, the sustained pathologisation of trans identities seems to, paradoxically, validate transgender identities and authoritative medical discourses are seen as the panacea for "fixing" transness and realigning the individual to the normative constructions of gender. The "wrong body" narrative is prevalent as it is predicated on the medical processes to "fix" the body to align with the gender a person identifies with.

The South African public is more sympathetic to transgender people who have been medically diagnosed with gender dysphoria (previously gender identity disorder) and this diagnosis grants the "patient" access to gender affirmative healthcare (McLachlan, 2018). This was also noted in a study by Husakouskaya (2013) that reports on how the participants in the study used strategic ways of naming themselves in order to access gender affirmative resources. The studies show how the power of medical discourses 'fix' gender in the body and construct transgender identity as a deviation that can be corrected. However, trans people find ways to work with the system in order to achieve the bodily appearance that reflects their authentic selves.

Masculine subjectivity: becoming, visibility, recognition

In much of the literature on masculinity in South Africa from the disciplines of sociology, anthropology and psychology, conceptualisations of masculinity have been dominantly theorised alongside cisgender heterosexual masculinities. The literature on masculinity reveals a great deal of essentialising and conceptual conflation. Language use pertaining to masculinity reflects culturally specific understandings and sometimes adopts essentialised or oversimplified

understandings of concepts introduced in research or scholarly literature. Although identity labels by their very nature constitute unstable, conflicted zones of cultural contests, the use of the word trans masculine as a linguistic container denoting those who were assigned to the female sex at birth and are identifying on a male and/or masculinity spectrum is consistent with current social science and humanistic scholarship. Masculinities, as an academic sub-discipline in South Africa, has a relatively brief history. However, the burst into the intellectual field has produced a corpus of work on men, masculinities, and manhood (Morrell, 1998; Morrell et al. 2012; Ratele 2006). The interest in masculinities has propelled extensive studies on black masculinity (Ratele, 2006), traditional masculinity, the history of masculinities in South Africa (Phillip, 2005), gender-based violence (Mathews, Jewkes, and Abrahams, 2014), and HIV, fatherhood (Viljoen, 2011) queer masculinities (see: Tucker, 2009; Visser, 2013; Reddy, 1998). The emerging trend in recent masculinity studies suggests an apparent crisis in masculinity with Moolman (2013) arguing masculinities transition in light of the changing socio-political context of the country. Recent research has focused on poststructuralist thinking in arguing that masculinities are not monolithic but socially situated and discursively produced (see: Msibi, 2018; Helman and Ratele, 2018). These studies challenge the assumptions of masculinity as monolithic and immutable.

There is a dearth of literature exploring the meanings, understandings, performance of masculinity by people who are not cis-gender men. Very few studies have explored the embodiment of masculinity in 'female-bodied' individuals by studying butch-lesbian masculinity (Swarr, 2012b) and transgender masculinities. For instance, Francis (2014) writes on how a rural transgender man navigates his gender. Thato, the participant in Francis's study, navigation of masculinity concerns, not norm-breaking but getting recognition as a man in a space where there are clear expectations for women and men (Francis, 2014). Further, Francis (2014) reports that "despite having a female body" Thato's enactment of masculinity reveals the illusion of masculine essentialism and emphasises that there are no fixed configurations of masculinity. Francis (2014) employs Connell's gender theory to frame the understanding of transgender men through masculinity. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity has been critiqued for its over-reliance of structuralist and deterministic notions of gender; as such the conceptualisation of masculinity in Francis (2014) could be argued to invoke a deterministic idea of (transgender) masculinity.

Trans narratives often reference the physical alteration of the body to align it with the gender a person identifies with. Cheryl Stobie (2014:156), writing on the autobiography *Black*

Bull, Ancestors and me: my life as a lesbian as a sangoma by Nkunzi Nkabinde argues that Nkabinde's textual body, when viewed through the lens of transgender narratives, reflects a profound sense of unhappiness with features of the author's biological sex and associated roles. Nevertheless, Nkunzi's body remains unaltered, although the represented self conforms more closely to the appearance and roles of masculinity. This underscores the role of the body in the perception and performance of masculinity. An identification of masculinity for transgender people does not always proceed from a reconstruction of the body to align it with the normative idea of masculine predicated on cis-gender male masculinity.

Transgender memoirs have shed light on the complexities of navigating life as a transgender man or female-to-male person (FTM). The autobiographical trans narratives draw from masculine and feminine gender norms to articulate their resistance towards, or assimilation to, normative constructions of gender. Narratives of trans masculine people (female-to-male, trans men, non-binary masculine) often revolve around the idea of assuming a masculine subjectivity that is usually achieved through undergoing hormone therapy to accentuate masculine features, such as a beard and a deep voice. In a collection of personal trans narratives, the book *Trans: Transgender Life Stories from South Africa* illustrates how the stories of transgender men revolve around the difficulty they experienced with gender incongruence during childhood and the activities and experiences that the individuals missed out on due to being uncomfortable with their gender assignment. One participant in the book expresses, "I hated doing domestic science while the boys did metal and woodwork. This was a waste of time for me because all I would do was sit there against my will" (Morgan, Marais, and Wellbeloved, 2009:19). While the narratives do not explicitly focus on experiences of embodying masculinity as trans men, they do focus on the technologies of orienting the body with a masculine appearance. Becoming masculine and being seen as a masculine/man is important for most trans men, as is evident in their citing of medical transitioning as a turning point in their lives (Morgan, Marais, and Wellbeloved, 2009). Similarly, the importance of medical transitioning is echoed by Mabenge (2018), who details the laborious and complicated process of accessing gender affirmative surgeries and the medical costs that hinder the process of medical transitioning. Trans identities are commonly framed and understood through medical discourses that reveal the abiding genderism in the healthcare system.

Conclusion

As the literature reviewed shows, dominant understanding of transgender identities in South Africa draws heavily from medical research (psychiatry and endocrinology), psychology, and cultural and religious discourses which have tended to relegate transgender identity to the realm of pathology and abjection. Current scholarship on transgender identity is saturated with medical narratives of transgender identity that often pathologise transgender subjectivity. Constructing transgender through medical narratives of gender have contributed to the stabilisation of narratives that anchor gender on essentialist notions that often invoke the body as the site of or the truth/falsity of gender. The body is invoked as the materiality through which to 'correct' gender; to align it to either masculine or feminine markers of gender embodiment. The proliferation of "the wrong body" narrative of transgender people has, in most cases been used to make sense of transgender embodiment. Similarly, transgender scholarship often centres the question of the physical embodiment of gender and a quest to discover the "truth" of gender which does little but to realign trans narratives within the binary idea of gender and avoid questions of the complexities of trans identities as experienced and navigated by trans individuals.

Further, transgender subjectivity is often reduced to pragmatic questions of legality healthcare. While this is important, it is crucial to question the abiding gender binary which makes it challenging to understand gender beyond the essentialising discourses of gender; even when the laws of the country acknowledge and protect counter/anti-normative gender and sexual identities. The literature underscores the typical treatment of transgender people in healthcare facilities where they are often the subject of undignified inquiry; stripped of any sense of agency and intentionality. The richness and depth of transgender subjectivity is reduced to an oversimplification of transition as a 'becoming normal' narrative that permeates society's (trans) gender consciousness. With this narrative, trans histories become devoid, creating conditions which open trans subjectivity to prejudiced criticism.

The literature is also animated with ontological questions of transgender identities, focusing on the meaning of transgender and how individuals came to identify their gender as trans. Medical discourses are central to this explication of trans identities of becoming where accounts of hormone replacement therapy and gender-affirming surgeries and HIV risk and prevention narratives inundate the literature (Wilson et al., 2014; Nduna, 2012; Muller, 2017; Poteat et al., 2019). The medical accounts of transgender identity seem to validate transgender subjectivity as

transgender people who seek to transition employ the medical rhetoric of transgender identity (Husakouskaya, 2015). The medical discourses of transgender identity relied heavily upon in the South African context as an arena where transgender rights are contested. Transgender identities in South Africa are still embedded within the medical narratives of gender, and the literature has been complicit in the perpetuation of gender essentialism in the understanding and documenting of transgender identities. The studies uncritically seek medicalised transgender narratives and visibilize narratives that privilege the binary understanding of gender. The studies rarely complicate the interplay of heteronormativity and compulsory cisnormativity in the medical construction of transgender identities.

Furthermore, the literature on transgender identity in South Africa is mostly qualitative, including small samples in the studies, and the research location usually includes urban or metropolitan areas (monakali, 2017; Husakouskaya, 2015; Francis, 2014). Some studies that claim to include transgender participants in their sample usually have one or two transgender people in the study and the rest being LGB (Daniels et al., 2019; Mavhandu-Mudzisi and Sandy, 2015). There is an uncritical use of the term LGB, as cautioned by Matebeni (2014) in studies that are 'inclusive' of transgender identities. There is also a lack of transgender scholarship that maps the experiences of transgender embodiment as it intersects with other identity statuses, for instance, race, class, location, and education. In response to this knowledge gap, the present qualitative research study focuses on trans masculine subjectivity to broaden the understanding and performance of transgender masculinities. Trans masculinity is a site worth exploring because learning about the lived experiences of trans masculine individuals enables a different reflection and level of analysis on the discourses of masculinity, bodies and identities beyond the parameters of cis- centred masculine discourses – a discourse that has reified the "natural" construction of bodies and identities.

Transmasculine subjectivity troubles the unity of 'natural bodies' and 'natural genders' in dominant discourses of gender and prompts us to rethink the limits around gender assignment, expression, bodies and the assumed coherence of identity constructs. The construction of masculinity is contingent on context, culture, and history. In this study, I am concerned with the discursive constructions of gender (masculinity) and how trans masculine-identified individuals position themselves in relation to competing gender discourses. The trans masculine narratives presented in this study explicate the various discourses through which trans masculinity is

constituted. The narratives also show how trans masculine individuals challenge, subvert and appropriate dominant discourses of gender to create and affirm multiple masculine subject positions. It is important to note here that masculinities are situational; they are conceived of and performed in varied ways depending on the context.

My study departs from an essentialist exploration of transgender identity and explores how discourses frame gendered subjectivity and how transgender people draw from, resist and queer dominant notions of gender. This study is rooted in the poststructuralist tradition of thought that conceptualises identity as constructed, open, and always changing. The present study aims to contribute to the dialogue between transgender and masculinity studies by exploring the discursive constructions of trans masculinity.

3. Theoretical Orientations

The present chapter outlines the theoretical positioning of this study. The first part of the chapter expands on the discussion of gender as performative, drawing from Butler's (1990) theory of performativity. The second part of the chapter introduces queer theory as a framework for conceptualising gender and outlines the utility of queer theory in a study of trans masculinity. The last section of the chapter engages with queer phenomenology and frames masculinity using Kalle Berggren's (2014) concept of 'sticky' masculinity.

Gender Performativity and Discourse

Post-structuralism breaks away from a conception of social identity as fixed and essential where subjects are seen as autonomous creators of themselves. Instead, post-structuralism holds that individuals are not transparent to themselves, as Butler (2005) explicates, "it is not that subjects are individual rational actors at a distance from external discourses from external discourse of social life – but rather that such discourses are already part of us, in ways that we cannot fully 'know' or account for". Butler's (1993:21) theory of performativity holds that "gender is performative in so far as it is the effect of a regulatory regime of gender differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized under constraint". Gender is in itself a regulatory mechanism that dictates states of appearance and behaviour. Furthermore, Butler (1993:2) posits that "performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate act but rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names". As such, Butler (1993:22) argues, "gender performativity is not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today; it is a matter of reiterating or repeating norms by which one is constituted; it is not a radical fabrication of a gendered self".

The conscious and unconscious adherence to gender norms and cultural signifiers of sexuality and gender both bring the subject into being and constrain the identity enactments of that subject (Butler, 1993). Gender is regulated by norms legitimating behaviours, roles, and expectations framed by various discourses. How we look and appear to others, as either feminine or masculine or in-between, is dictated by social norms that inform gender (un)intelligibility (Butler, 2004). Discourses of gender shape the forms of embodied gender knowledge and how we think about and perform gender. Social identities are constituted within discourses. Dominant discourses shape and regulate the contours of social identities, delineating what forms of

embodiment are possible and acceptable — the result of various discourses that frame legitimate and illegitimate identities in a particular context.

From a transgender perspective, various discourses of gender constitute trans identities in complex but consistent ways. For instance, the dominant discourses of gender informed by patriarchy and biological essentialism construct trans identity as 'unreal'. The social construction of gender is a historically and culturally variable process, meaning that the specific meanings attached to gender vary across cultures and history. The challenge in this study is to make sense of how trans masculine subjectivities are at once framed and concealed by various discourses of gender. At the core of this study, is an appeal to the deconstruction of the layered nature and fluidity of trans masculine subjectivity. Fluidity here is not meant to refer to an ever abruptly changing, indistinct embodiment, but the condition of being open to and susceptible to change, an embodiment that precludes narratives of essential genders. Gendered embodiment always points to and is pointed at by competing discourses.

Does the fact of becoming or being a gendered subject made visible/intelligible through discursive practices suggest that individuals are merely the passive, unstable, fragmented products of competing discourses? Weedon (1997) offers an answer to this question by arguing that "although 'the subject' is always socially constructed within discourses the individual nonetheless exists as a thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices". Individuals negotiate, resist, and/or reject particular subject positions by drawing from various discourses to inform their identities. Dominant discourses of gender dictate the sphere of recognition; they determine what is revealed and what is concealed. Cisnormativity designates a "sphere of appearance" – a field of behaviours, roles, and (bodily) materiality that serve to materialise a gender knowledge that sustains the notion that individuals assigned either male or female at birth will grow up to become men or women, respectively, and in line with compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) these individuals will romantically and sexually desire members of the 'opposite' sex. Troubling the biological essentialist notion of gender as tied up in materiality (the body) as the site of origin has been an illuminating discussion within queer scholarship.

Queer Theory

Queer theory is usually associated with sexuality studies. In this study, I focus on gender identity and the construction of masculinity. Troubling the discourse of cisnormativity, queer theory unsettles the gender binary and problematises the causal construction of sex, gender, and sexuality. Importantly, queer theory takes into consideration the fact that these concepts are also based on and operate within a discursive understanding of power where sexual and gender subjectivities are fashioned from the signifying systems of the dominant sex and gender taxonomies (Valocchi, 2005:751). As Butler (1993:2) asserts, "sex (*and gender*) are not merely what one has or a static description of what one is; it is one of the norms by which the 'one' becomes viable at all, gender and sexuality norms qualify a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility". Queer theory interrogates the construction and regulation of borders in sexual and gender identities. Seidman (1994:173) argues that any specific identity construction "is arbitrary, unstable, and exclusionary". Identity constructions are fundamentally exclusionary, where an individual is oriented towards specific identifications and not others. Seidman (1994:173-174) argues that queer theory offers a conceptualisation of identity that is "permanently open as to its meaning and the political use and encourages the public surfacing of differences or a culture where multiple voices and interests are heard".

In line with its post-structuralist leanings, queer theory recognises the impossibility of moving outside current conceptions of gender and sexuality. That is we cannot assert ourselves to be entirely outside of cisnormativity and heterosexuality nor entirely inside, because each of these terms achieves its meaning through the other. Queer theory suggests that what we can do is negotiate these limits of gender norms (Namaste, 1994:224). To do this, we ought to think not only of the mere existence of these boundaries but also of how they are created, regulated, and contested. As such, this study finds queer theory useful primarily as an attempt to undermine an overall discourse of normative gender categorisations and to interrogate and highlight the limitations and inconsistencies of cisnormativity. A queer analysis of trans masculinity offers a unique way of understanding the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality. Queer theory complements trans masculinity's troubling of the easy conflation of gender, sex, and sexuality. A queer analysis of gender reveals the instabilities in hegemonic gender order and is sensitive to how individuals may subvert, reject, or appropriate the normative constructions of sex, gender, and sexuality in how they understand and perform gender.

Post-structuralist accounts of gender and queer theory often fail to explicitly consider how gender and gender expression (masculinity in particular) are reflected upon and made sense of by individuals. How gender is performed has a lot to do with the body and how the body is experienced in relation to or in response to gender norms. Gendered subjectivity is not merely a semantic construction; it has a material reality. As discussed previously, gender norms work through disciplining mechanisms that shape the body through repetitive citation of norms and dictate how and where the body appears. Gender is inscribed on the body; the body becomes the material reference from which gendered instructions and performances proceed. The construction of bodies functions through a network of metaphysical oppositions: for example, masculine/feminine; man/woman; black/white. The construction of meaning proceeds from this metaphysical opposition often privileging the masculine where meanings become phallogocentric (Derrida, 1978). To negotiate this gap between the discursive constructions of gender and the interpellation of gender norms onto the body, I turn to queer phenomenology to tease out the various ways to account for the importance of lived bodily experience in trans masculine subjectivity, and to explore the important constructs of agency and self-reflexivity in the navigation and negotiation of trans masculine positionality.

Queer Phenomenology: bodies in discourse/discursive bodies

Drawing on queer phenomenology, this study attempts to bridge the gap in the discursive construction of gender and the lived material effects of such constructions. The manner in which the body emerges in the social field is dictated by gender norms which conceal and preclude the intelligibility of different gendered embodiments (Butler, 1993). Bodies are oriented towards various forms of gendered expressions; some dominant, resistant, and normative, and others queer. Drawing from the work of Sara Ahmed (2006a, 2006b), I interrogate the ways in which the trans masculine body appears or fails to appear as an intelligible masculine embodiment in the "sphere of appearance" and the effects of embodying such a body. Drawing from phenomenology, Ahmed (2006b:544) writes that "bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable". Queer phenomenology offers a means to explore the embodied experiences of trans masculine individuals of being and living in a cisnormative world and how might drawing upon cisnormative ideals of gender constitute trans masculine subjectivity as "queer". A queer phenomenological exploration of gendered experience underscores the varied ways of being in the world that gives

support to those who queer gender and are thus made to appear "oblique" and "out of place" (Ahmed, 2006b). Trans masculinity in the broader discourse of masculinity is an orientation towards masculine embodiment that extends beyond the cis-normative conception of masculinity.

Ahmed (2006b:565) argues that "orientation affects what bodies can do". Borrowing from Ahmed, I argue that to name oneself as trans masculine "requires reinhabiting one's body, given that one's body no longer extends the space or even skin of the social" (Ahmed, 2006b:565). Pursuing a more masculine embodiment takes time; it requires repeated movement towards symbols that mark the body as masculine. Ahmed (2006a:107) adds that queer orientations are "those that do not line up, which by seeing the world 'slantwise' allow other objects to come into view" (2006a:107). Following this assertion, I argue that the view opened up by the 'slantwise' orientation towards trans masculinity could potentially reveal possibilities contained within and beyond the constrained construction of normative masculinity, that is, masculinity embodied by people conventionally and culturally assigned 'men'.

The stories that transgender people tell proceed from a bodily experience of gender and the discourses that shape the construction of bodies. Harcourt, Heukmann, and Asya (2016:5) state that "bodies are sites both of normalisation and resistance since social norms of gender and sexuality are inscribed on the body". Transgender narratives of the body underscore the centrality of the materiality of the body in the accounts of gender euphoria, or being comfortable in one's body. Gender norms disrupt the possibilities of diverse gender embodiment. Transgender bodies, whether pre- transition or during transition are always the point from which new stories about comfort, belonging, visibility are narrated. The body is felt and it feels as it brushes up against the tyranny of gender norms. Re-orienting the body with one's felt gender embodiment is at once an act of familiarising oneself with the idea of the self, re-introducing and re-orienting the 'new' body to a different kind of familiarity, to a (gender) language that does not elude the body like it previously did.

Bodies are part of the normative construction of gender and sexuality in everyday life (Harcourt et al., 2016:5). The body is not "merely an object in the world", rather "it is our point of view in the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:5 quoted in Ahmed, 2006b:551). "Bodies, as well as objects, take shape by being oriented towards each other, as an orientation that may be experienced as the cohabitation or sharing of space" (Ahmed, 2006b:552). Keeping with Ahmed's line of thought, I argue, similarly, that transgender individuals navigate the compulsory field of cultural

markers of cisnormativity that requires the repudiation of other possible gender embodiments. Echoing Butler (1993), normativity is the effect of repeating bodily actions over time, which produce some bodies and not others.

Bringing together queer theory and queer phenomenology in a study on transmasculine subjectivity allows us to ponder the complexity of the question: How do we make sense of trans masculine bodies; bodies oriented towards the masculine that do not, however, retain the 'quality' of a prior masculine designation? How do we make sense of trans narratives that invoke 'wrong body' articulations of 'transness'? What does it mean for the body to be 'wrong' or what does it mean to posit the body as 'wrong' in relation to embodied gender identity? How can we think through the materiality and signification of the body in the context of trans masculine subjectivity? These are the questions I will bring forth in chapter four.

Conceptualising Masculinity as 'Sticky'

Critical studies on men and masculinities (CSMM) is a broad research area known internationally through the works of Connell (1987); Kimmel (2005); Hearn (2004); Bridges and Pascoe (2016); and in South Africa, Ratele (2006, 2013, 2016); Bhana (2005); and Morrell (1998, 2001). There have been multiple offerings in the approaches to studying masculinity, notable mentions include hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987); African masculinity (Epprecht, 1998; Ouzgane and Morrell, 2005); inclusive masculinity (Anderson, 2010), mosaic masculinity (Coles, 2008), hybrid masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe, 2014), and caring masculinity (Elliot, 2016). Most of these approaches draw inspiration from a long-standing conceptualisation of men/masculinity proposed by Connell (1987). Hegemonic masculinity is a conceptual tool for understanding and analysing masculinity and has become an "epistemological axiom" in the study of masculinity and men (Morrell, 1998; Hearn and Morrell, 2012; Bhana, 2005; Ratele, 2008). Connell (1987) draws from theories of patriarchy and cultural hegemony to propose hegemonic masculinity as "the pattern of practice, that is, things done by 'men' and not just a set of role expectations or an identity that allows men's dominance over women to continue". Further, Connell (1987:183-186) argues that hegemonic masculinity is fundamentally 'heterosexual', it enjoys a very 'public' status and is "always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women". Hegemonic masculinity also manifests in the social ascendancy of specific (hetero-patriarchal) masculinity which is "embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content

and wage structures" (Connell, 1987:184). Hegemonic masculinity has been critiqued a great deal with some scholars of men and masculinity (Collison and Hearn, 1994) positing that the concept elides or de-emphasises issues of power and domination; essentialises the character of men (Peterson, 1998; Collier, 1998); and does not adopt a post-structuralist toolkit which would emphasise the discursive construction of identities (Whitehead, 2002). In rethinking the concept, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005:836) disagree with the critique that the original concept of hegemonic masculinity was framed within a heteronormative understanding of gender that essentialises male-female differences. They maintain that "masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005:836). Masculinities, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) further argue, "are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting". Masculinities as configurations of practice only tell half the story. Connell and Messerschmidt's articulation of masculinity presupposes a 'man' who is prior to the "configurations of practice", a 'man' who negotiates his positionality against and within the patterns and iterations of masculinity in the gender hierarchy. The 'man' who takes on masculinity is posited as an ontological necessity for the embodiment of masculinity. The rethinking of the concept has not resolved this essentialist aspect of sex, that is, of a 'man' who is prior to masculinity, thus maintaining the structuralist influences of hegemonic masculinity.

My study approaches masculinity as a sociological concept considering the corpus of approaches to studying masculinity that has come out of both the global south and the global north. This section is not concerned with a genealogical analysis of the concept of masculinity; it instead focuses on the conceptualisation of masculinity that takes into consideration post-structuralist thinking on gender and argues for a concept of masculinity that accounts for agency and emotional reflexivity of masculine subjects. In this study, I take on a different conceptualisation of masculinity that draws from post-structuralist constructions of identity. Kalle Berggren (2014) proposed an approach to understanding masculinity as 'sticky'. This approach considers how masculine subject positions are constructed, engaged with, and negotiated in discourse. Drawing on Sara Ahmed's work (2014, 2006a), Berggren (2014:245) suggests that understanding masculinity as sticky is "a way to avoid the false choice between discourse/power and bodies/lived experience". Berggren states that:

> Bodies culturally read as "men" are oriented towards culturally established signs of "masculinity", such as hardness and violence. The repeated sticking together of certain bodies and signs in this way is what creates masculine subjectivity. The repeated bodily actions and behaviours become sedimented and present/represent a particular embodiment of masculinity. This is always a contested, variable, and uncertain process, but one in which the repeated enactment of masculinity tends to be sticky and naturalised (Berggren, 2014:245).

The culturally established signs of masculinity stick to bodies assigned or self-identified as men or masculine. Berggren further adds that "masculinity shapes the bodies it encounters as 'men'; it impresses on them, directs them, and orients them" (Berggren, 2014:246). Furthermore, Berggren notes the flexibility and contradiction inherent in the social construction of identity and states that "the circulation of norms stick to bodies, and the more masculinity is performed, the stickier it becomes". In line with post-structuralist thinking on identity, conceptualising masculinity as sticky allows us to see that subjects (who embrace a masculine embodiment) are positioned by competing discourses (Berggren, 2014:247). Thinking of masculinity as sticky, Berggren (2014:246) posits, "is to be able to give an account of power, conflicting positioning as well as of lived experience, without recourse to either language-only metaphors or a notion of authenticity".

Whitehead (2002:210) advanced a similar proposal when discussing the ontology of the masculine. As he suggests, "masculinity can be seen as the pursuit of being and becoming masculine by the masculine subject". Already existing norms mark certain bodies with masculine traits. These bodies are discursively constructed as masculine by virtue of their traits which have been co-opted by culture to distinguish between the ideal of the oppositional 'masculine' and 'feminine'. For Whitehead (2002:210), "the masculine is contingent and unstable, and, for that reason, a masculine sense of self can only be achieved through the constant engagement in those discursive practices of signification that suggest masculinity".

Applying the concept of sticky masculinity to a South African study of trans masculinities helps us bring to bear the multiple levels of interpellation and recognition implicated in the embodiment of masculinity and analyse the disjuncture within and between the popular discourses of gender. Furthermore, Berggren's (2014) conceptualisation of masculinity as 'sticky', although exploratory and used cautiously in this study, is useful in thinking both about discursive explanations of gender and the lived experiences of individuals read as "men" or failed to be read as men while embodying masculinity. While the concept does not include an analysis of

power/subjectivity as it intersects with other identities, Berggren (2014:247) cautions that an empirical analysis of men/masculinity ought to be situated in relation to other competing positionalities; age, race, sexuality, class and ability. As such, in this study, I pay attention to the popular and competing discourses of identity that are implicated in the construction of trans masculinity.

Dominant notions of gender repeatedly "stick" to the body and orient the individual towards certain lived experiences. Individuals "tend toward" cultural markers of gender and perform either masculinity or femininity. Conceiving of trans masculinity as sticky appeals to the performance of cultural markers that mark the body as either masculine or feminine. One could argue that for trans masculine individuals navigating the 'sticky' normative masculine norms evokes ambivalence and an awkward tension with assigned and self-defined gender embodiment. Trans masculine individuals, socialised into feminine gender roles, consistently cite, and perform cultural markers of masculinity that impress upon their bodies to bear (stereotypical/intelligible) masculine appearance and behaviours. To reiterate, popular cultural markers of masculinity shape the surfaces of bodies they encounter through the repeated performance of cultural markers of masculinity. Masculinity is not the exclusive embodiment of bodies assigned to the male sex but a collection of roles, behaviours and imaginaries that are continually being challenged and as such are evolving. Theorising trans masculinities through the concept of 'sticky' masculinity is insufficient in accounting for the active and reflective aspect of trans masculine people and how they reflect on and make sense of their masculine positionality in society. Following Weedon's (1997) argument that "individuals exist as thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices", I argue that it is important for a study of masculinity, specifically trans masculinity given its political and social complexities, to account for trans masculine individual's reflexivity and agency in navigating and negotiating their positionality within various discursive practices.

Conclusion

A post-structural reading of masculinity opens up new ways of thinking about masculinity and the effects of such constructions. To queer masculinity in this study means to question and trouble the taken for granted understandings of masculinity, to 'lose our expertise' as Butler suggests, and to not create a metanarrative that seeks to homogenise and reify a particular

construction of masculinity. It is to take stock of the negotiation and effect of taking up particular masculine subject positions. Trans masculinity is an important analytical category in this project, revealing the porosity, tensions, and inconsistencies inherent in the concept of gender and the fragmented constructions and articulations of masculine subjectivity. As argued previously, queering masculinity does not imply that trans masculinity can be asserted entirely outside of standard configurations of masculinity instead it means that trans masculine individuals negotiate, reconcile, and trouble the limits of the discourses of masculinity at the intersection of lived experience and discursive understandings of gender. Bringing together queer theory, queer phenomenology, and the conceptualisation of masculinity as 'sticky', allows for an exploration of trans masculinities that is cognizant of the nuances of lived experience, yet is in relation to discourses that inform performances of masculinity. Furthermore, this integrated theoretical approach is useful in the examination of how trans masculine individuals negotiate their trans masculinity, relationships, and positions in the world in relation to how they are located by different discourses of identity. It should be understood that undertaking such an inquiry ought to proceed from an acknowledgement of the multiple social identities that inform an individual's positionality in society to avoid drawing narrow conclusions and potentially pigeonholing trans masculine experiences.

4. Findings and Analysis

In the introduction to the thesis, I presented the method followed in this study to orient the reader to the methodological persuasions and epistemologies guiding this study. To recap, two methods of analysis were utilised; first, within-case and cross-case analysis following Merriam's (2009; 1998) guide to analysing multiple cases and the second, Foucauldian discourse analysis following Carabine's (2001) guidelines to doing an FDA. The first level of analysis, within-case analysis, constituted of reading and coding each interview in relation to the research questions. The second level of analysis involved a cross-case analysis of all seven interviews to cross-reference the categories that emerged from the within-case analysis and developing themes that correspond to the research questions. The third level of analysis involved the use of Foucauldian discourse analysis lens to analyse the themes emerging from the cross-case analysis. The analysis draws on the Foucauldian concepts of discourse, power/knowledge and normalisation to make sense of the discursive construction of trans masculinity. As there is no one correct or privileged way of conducting FDA, Carabine (2001:285) argues that it is difficult to identify the steps by step process of analysis as the process is dynamic and some levels coincide and others not. With that said, the steps followed in conducting the FDA in this study included paying attention to how trans masculinity is 'spoken of' and how trans masculine individuals make sense of gender through citing particular discourses. I looked for evidence of inter-relationship within and between the three discourses and identified the discursive strategies used to construct a particular version of masculinity as privileged or 'normal'. Further, I looked for silences and counter-discourses that were embedded in the construction of trans masculinity. Lastly, I identified the effects of the three discourses of gender that emerged in the construction and performance of trans masculinity. This study is exploratory, as such combining the two data analysis methods allows for a broad exploration of the data to map the competing and complementary discursive constructions of trans masculinity and track similarities and differences in how trans masculine individuals construct masculine subject positions.

The present findings and analysis chapter presents the three main discourses that emerged from the FDA. Each of the three discourses blends interrelated and competing discourses invoked by the participants to negotiate and navigate various masculine subject positions. I have chosen to present findings and analysis simultaneously to allow for an interpretation of findings with reference to literature and theory. The chapter is divided into three parts; the first part explores and

analyses the discourse of 'gender-specific bodies' that participants cite to construct their understanding and experience of gender. The second part looks at how trans masculinity is constituted through the discourse of medical transitioning. Finally, the third part of the chapter engages the discourse of patriarchal masculinity to illustrate the various ways that the participants draw from counter- and less powerful discourses to challenge and resist the authority of patriarchal masculine norms and take up counter-patriarchal masculine subject positions.

I. Constituting gender through the 'gender-specific bodies' discourse

Perceptions of the body and how it 'ought to' look like have implications on how gender is perceived and how others attach specific meanings to individual bodily styles. The discourse of 'gender-specific bodies' constructs gender through the binary notion of female and male bodies. Most of the participants in this study cited the body as a point from which they understand and experience gender. The participants emphasise the idea of 'gender-specific bodies', bodies that are constructed as either female or male bodies to make a claim to intelligible gender identity. In the study, a particular effort was made by trans men to particularise the bodily forms of gender embodiment that construct them as men as opposed to non-binary participants who deviated from the idea of the body as the locus of gender. Citing the 'gender-specific bodies' discourse positions trans masculine participants in seemingly intelligible and coherent gender identity. Below, Buhle speaks of his experience of being assigned to the female sex category and the implications of that assignment:

> I never felt right as a girl. I was never like, I never even dated a boy for like two days, never. I always knew there was something wrong with me…I felt like I was stuck in the wrong body. If I was born in the right body, which is a man, I was going to be a straight man. Date women, just like I am now, I wouldn't even date trans women. (Buhle, 23, trans man)

Buhle frames how he felt about his gender assignment as "wrong" which, presumably, made him feel like there was something inherently wrong with his body. Buhle constructs his gender assignment as not "right" and describes feeling like he was "stuck in the wrong body". The construction of bodies as either 'right' or 'wrong' echoes the dominant discourse of human biology that determines what men's and women's bodies ought to look like, what they can and cannot do (Annandale and Hammarstrom, 2011:577-578). Buhle draws from a powerful discourse to

articulate his felt gender identity as somehow being displaced by the body. There is another implicit yet powerful discourse that validates the 'gender-specific body' idea that Buhle invokes, consider the comment: "I never even dated a boy even for like two days, never". This comment is reminiscent of another powerful discourse; the discourse of heterosexuality which is drawn upon to validate his feeling of being "stuck in the wrong body" and consequentially not to date boys. It is sufficiently recognised that heterosexuality is closely linked to gender norms (Nielsen, Walden, and Kunkel, 2000; Jackson, 2006; Pascoe, 2011). Buhle constructs his gender through a 'gender-specific body' framework that is reinforced by heterosexuality norms. The relationship between heterosexuality and gender is emphasised in the repudiation of the idea of dating boys which would presumably complicate the legitimacy of the participant's gender identity. Assuming a gender, as Butler (1993:3) argues, is contingent upon the "heterosexual imperatives that enable certain sexed identification and forecloses other identifications". As such, the construction of transgender through the binary idea of male or female bodies and the disavowal of 'female' bodily form is contingent on the dominant discourse of 'gender-specific bodies' that normalises and regulates the idea of distinctly male and female bodies. The experience of the gendered body as "wrong" could be read as situating the experience of being in the body as, to echo Engdhal (2014:226), a "subjectively felt bodily meaning interacting with cultural interpretations of bodies where the subjective and the cultural are not always congruent". An instance where gender assignment and cultural constructions of gender contradict and dislocate the felt experience of one's gender. Further, one can argue that transgender enters this frame of 'gender-specific bodies' as an articulation of the felt bodily and gender incongruence. For some participants, however, this experience of incongruence did not instantaneously alert them to the fact of being transgender, as Luke articulates below:

> I didn't like being a girl, but I didn't know anything about being transgender. As I got older, probably like a teenager, I got more like…just thinking I hate being female. I wasn't saying I think I'm a boy I want to have a penis or something like that, it was just, I felt like I wish I was a boy. (Luke, 29, trans man)

Luke positions himself as not being knowledgeable about transgender identity, "I wasn't saying I think I'm a boy I want to have a penis or something like that, it was just I felt like I wish I was a boy". The possibility of becoming a boy is relegated to the realm of fantasy, positioning, I argue, his discontentment with his assigned gender as real but his desire and wish to become a boy

as somewhat unreal. In this sense, gender and sexuality are constructed as limited to the binary, the powerful binary discourse of gender conceals knowledge about counter- and anti-normative gender embodiments, thus normalising the idea of bodies as either female or male. Drawing from Ahmed's (2006a:45) argument that "norms surface as the surfaces of bodies", the narrative above clearly illustrates this instance of how bodies take shape and appear on the plane of gender intelligibility is contingent on the normative ideals of masculinity and femininity where bodies surface either feminine or masculine. Dominant discourses of gender normalise and regulate the idea of a binary modality of gender which precludes the existence of other forms of gender embodiment. Below, Luke explains his hatred of his breasts and their link to the discomfort he felt in his body:

> I've always been open about the fact that I hated breasts before I even realised, I was transgender. I'd be like can I just get an operation to get rid of them and for some reason that didn't connect to being transgender. I didn't know I could do something about feeling uncomfortable in your body. I just thought you'd have to be miserable for the rest of your life. (Luke, 29, trans man)

In this account, Luke gestures to the normative assumption that breasts are a biological marker of femininity or 'femaleness', and thus appear incompatible with his identity. Luke also draws from a common medical practice within transgender narratives – chest reconstruction surgery, as central to reconciling his discomfort in his body.

The physicality of bodies is enmeshed within the power of gender discourse that regulates what bodies are and how they surface (Butler, 1993). The discourse of 'gender-specific bodies' circumscribes the domain of gender intelligibility through defining the conditions necessary for a body to appear and be recognised as belonging to either woman or man, girl or boy. Nonetheless, discourses themselves are fluid (Carabine, 2001) as such, what is constituted in the dominant binary discourse of gender "is not fixed in or by discourse but becomes the condition and occasion for further action" (Butler, 1993:18). We can argue that the biological notions of gender, embedded in the gender-specific bodies discourse drawn from by the participants, interact with and are reinforced by the complementary discourse of heterosexuality to simultaneously materialise through the body and materialise the body as either man or woman, boy or girl. Consider the following statement by Seth:

> I don't hate God for making me a woman. I just feel like you gave me this body, and this is not how I want my outside to look, and I'm gonna change that. I don't like my hips they're way too big um obviously I don't like my boobs obviously they can go. So, I want to look more masculine like more buff and stuff. (Seth, 19, trans masculine)

Seth constructs his assigned gender through the invocation of a 'creator', who gives an individual a gender through the body. Seth invokes a discursively authoritative figure and positions himself as both within the 'natural', 'internal', 'God-given' notion of gender while also constructing his gender as malleable. In this statement, gender is constructed through the idea of internal or external. For instance, the assigned gender is constructed through an 'external' physicality that can be changed to materialise a different, 'internal', felt gender embodiment. Seth's construction of a given yet malleable gender draws from contradictory and competing knowledge that frames gender as fragmented and unfixed. Seth draws from these two competing discourses of gender to validate his gender positionality. Carabine (2001:274) states that "discourses draw upon and sometimes transform existing knowledge to produce new knowledge and new power effects". In the narrative above, Seth does not disavow the discourse of a 'God-given' bodily gender nevertheless he extends this knowledge to carve out a possibility for change; the appearance of a physical change that validates his gender identification. The discourses drawn from cohere and produce a subject position that affirms and validate Seth's gender.

Gender discourses produce and normalise sex and gender categories through various social practices. These social practices act as a disciplining technique that shapes bodies and behaviours (Foucault, 1978).

Muscular bodies

> I go to the gym. I'm trying to be consistent because I'm just like you're going to look amazing. When I'm there, I stare at myself, and go; you're going to have biceps and imagine things on myself. I want to look like a Dorito, muscular. (Mike*, 27, trans man)

In this statement, Mike* constructs his body through imagined 'biceps' and a muscular body. The discursive space of the gym is positioned as central to the achievement of muscular embodiment. The implication of the social practice of exercising is positioned as privileged to achieve a muscular body. This construction of muscular bodies as denoting masculinity or maleness can be located within the power/knowledge dynamic of masculine gender norms. Power,

according to Foucault (1980), "invests human bodies and subjugates them by turning them into objects of knowledge". Exercise becomes a disciplining technique that operates on the body to produce an ideal gendered (masculine) body. The centrality of the body in the materialisation of masculinity is illustrated below.

> I see trans masculinity as like a step up from a tomboy. So, like identifying masculine. I don't wanna say identifying as a man, but like identifying more masculine, enjoying masculine things, and dressing masculine, portraying yourself as more masculine. I bought a packer so that I could have that bulge, but I bought a packer that I like huge so when I put it on I was like this looks like a have a huge boner so maybe not, so I don't use it often, I barely use it. (Seth, 19, trans masculine)

In this account, Seth constructs trans masculinity as "a step up from a tomboy" and locates some of the practices that establish and legitimise masculine positionality through the body. Seth frames "identifying masculine" as not necessarily "identifying as a man". This comment implies that masculinity does not equate to or denote being a man. At the same time, Seth frames masculinity through the ideal of cisgender-male bodies. This is evident in the citing of the image of a phallus, represented by wearing a 'packer' (a prosthetic penis) used to create the impression of a "bulge". The creation of an impression of a phallus is positioned as demonstrating intelligible, normative masculinity. To reiterate, the discourse of gender-specific bodies implies that it operates through intelligible sex characteristic and materialises bodies as either masculine or feminine. Trans masculinity enters this discursive space and is marked by an oscillation between the intelligible embodiment of physical markers of masculinity or maleness that, through repetition, stick to the body and the imaginary construction of body parts.

> So, I wasn't like super comfortable walking past a mirror, pre-T, especially with the long hair like that just gave me a lot of dysphoria. But now we live in a house that literally has mirrors everywhere, we have like three mirrors in our bedroom so it's not really much getting away from it. But it's a lot better, I've also started, not that it looks like it, but exercising a little bit um and just seeing bit of results helps a lot. My body is looking better than what I thought it would at this stage. (Seth, 19, trans masculine)

The discourse of gender-specific bodies has implications for how bodies are constructed and how gender embodiment is felt or experiences through the body. In other words, how bodies take shape in relation to the world is implicated in complex relations of relationality and self-

perception. Mike's* narrative below illustrates the extent of the disconnect between the experience of the body as gendered and how the individual perceives of their bodies to be in alignment with their perceived sense of self.

> I've had such a trying relationship with my body where for the longest time I felt like it didn't belong to me. So, when people tell me things like, oh you have a great body…it didn't feel like they were talking to me. The way my body fills out my ass grows, and people are just like dang you got booty, and when that happens the men start looking at me and then it makes me want to crawl into a hole and never come out. (Mike*, 27, trans man)

Mike* elaborates on how his body is constructed and the implications thereof. Mike* makes an interesting comment that captures his experience of his body: "I've had such a trying relationship with my body where for the longest time I felt like it didn't belong to me". This comment suggests that the bodily experience of gender is constructed through the notion of belonging, where belonging becomes a marker for one's presence within the body (Ahmed, 2004:14). Consider the statement: "The way my body fills out my ass grows, and people are just like dang you got booty, and when that happens the men start looking at me and then it makes me want to crawl into a hole and never come out". This statement demonstrates how Mike's* body surfaces through and is apprehend by gender norms that are reinforced through heterosexual norms, "the men start looking at me". Mike* frames the comment, "you have a great body" as presumably invalidating and to an extent erases his felt gender embodiment. This comment shows how the materiality of the body is reiterated through a binary norm where the body is interpellated into a discourse of cis-heterosexuality and compelled to appear and serve the gaze of cis-heterosexuality.

Trans masculinity is discursively constructed through the conventional cis-hetero masculine norms that legitimate particular trans masculine subject positions. Bodies, both in their materiality and in our conception of them, are shaped by historical and cultural forces (McLaren, 2002:82). Again, the body is positioned as the surface through which sex and gender take form and are made sense of. The participants in this study cite dominant ideas of masculinity, imagined through the body, to talk about, construct and validate trans masculine subjectivity. The discourse of 'gender-specific bodies' coheres with heterosexual norms to construct 'coherent' forms of masculinity that rest upon the orientation towards the performance of normative markers of masculinity. This 'tending toward' gender-specific bodies materialises trans masculine

individuals' performance of gender as coherent. In other words, trans masculine subjectivity is reproduced through the citing of normative constructs of masculine bodies.

It is important to note that the subject positions taken up by the participants in the study also illustrate the power of the binary idea of gender. As shown in the narratives, the trans masculine participants' quest for the 'right' body is already implicated and constituted through the logics of compulsory cis-masculinities which construct 'real' gender embodiment as that which does not elide the body. Butler (1997) ponders the question of whether "gender identifications or rather the identifications that become central to the formation of gender are produced through melancholic identification"? Butler further explicates on this question, "if the assumption of femininity and the assumption of masculinity proceed through the accomplishment of an always tenuous heterosexuality, we might understand the force of this accomplishment mandating the abandonment of homosexual attachments" (Butler, 1997:135). In Buhle's narrative, there is a construction of heterosexual masculinities that construct transgender women as (romantically and sexually) undesirable, as expressed in the comment "If I was born in the right body, which is a man, I was going to be a straight man. Date women, just like I am now, I wouldn't even date trans women". Thus, positioning himself within the cis-heterosexual construction of gender precludes any doubt about the possibility of a sexual orientation outside of heterosexuality. The reinforcement of heterosexual orientation serves to establish one's embodiment of and alignment with a binary construction of gender. The fear of desiring transgender women may induce the idea that the trans masculine individual is not a man, or more specifically, that he is not a heterosexual man. As Butler (1997:21) argues, "heterosexual genders form themselves through the renunciation of the possibility of homosexuality, as a foreclosure which produces a field of heterosexual objects at the same time as it produces a domain of those whom it would be impossible to love". The positioning of transgender women as, to borrow from Butler, "impossible to love" as a transgender man also works to maintain the regulation of gender norms on sexuality, bodies and desirability.

The trans masculine subjectivity is produced through the repudiation of desiring bodies constructed through gender essentialism as 'male' bodies. Heterosexual desire is constructed through the idea of bodies as either male or female the negotiation of a 'proper' trans masculinity is entangled in the discourses of masculinity that position heterosexual masculinities as more dominant, powerful and more desirable.

(Un)binding masculinity

Dress features intricately in the stylisation of masculinity (gender). Dress functions to discipline the body to conform to normative constructions of femininity or masculinity. Dress is a discursive technique that tells the story of one's gender; how clothes are stylised and worn demonstrates one's relation to gendered scripts and how clothing articles are constructed as either masculinising or femininising.

> So now since being on T, if I'm wanting to pass like I can't have these things here on my chest, so I bought two new binders, but I don't love wearing a binder even though these are like one size up, which helps a lot. But I generally just wear stripes a lot because it hides my chest, and I just wear sports bras cos they're comfortable. My chest doesn't give me a whole lot of dysphoria just like the way a t-shirt fits, I guess, if the wind blows then yes, a lot. (Seth, 19, trans masculine)

In this statement, Seth illustrates the techniques he employs to achieve a masculine appearance. Seth constructs a masculine appearance through the imaginary of a flat chest, and frames wearing 'stripes', striped clothes, as concealing the appearance of a chest (breasts). This talk implies that a flat chest, a chest without breasts, marks the body as masculine. The binder is also invoked as another object of achieving masculine appearance. Dysphoria, or specifically gender dysphoria, describes "a state of discord between 'sex' (the body) and gender identity (the mind)" (Hines, 2010:2). In the description of the visibility of a flat chest as subjecting him to feelings of dysphoria, Seth draws from the discourse of transgender narratives to articulate an idea akin to the "wrong body" notion where, again, felt gender embodiment is contradicted by the appearance of the body. The possibility of the appearance of breasts holds the possibility of displacing or contradicting trans masculine subjectivity. In this narrative, the participant draws from a discourse of dysphoria, where articulations of gender incongruence are enmeshed in binary constructions of gender. The effect of this contradiction is demonstrated in the following account:

> I don't feel comfortable in a binder…like the whole day, I have to keep pulling it up. But at a previous job I wore a binder every day because nobody I was working with knew I was trans and when I was doing training people there said a lot of homophobic and transphobic things. (Luke, 29, trans man)

Luke constructs wearing a binder a necessary, although it is described as "uncomfortable", to forge an intelligible embodiment of masculinity or maleness that allows him to avoid the

possibility of experiencing transphobia. Luke constructs the people at his previous job as "homophobic and transphobic" thus wearing a binder "every day" is positioned as a protective move to avoid encountering transphobia.

One can see the insidious power of gender norms operating through the configuration of space and utterances that preclude the possibility of the presence openly trans subjectivity in the space. Homophobia and transphobic discourses implicit in Luke's statement above serve to validate cisgender heterosexual subjectivities while subjugating gender and sexuality embodiment that fall outside of or exists at the margins of the binary construction of gender. Luke navigates a masculine embodiment through his knowledge about transphobia and homophobia. Transphobia and homophobic discourses invoked by the participant highlight the consequence of the disciplinary might of cisnormative knowledges that limit the possibility of counter normative gender embodiments. In the statement below, Karabo, who had undergone chest reconstruction surgery a few months prior, comments on not having to wear a binder anymore:

> It's all worth it like right now I'm really happy – I don't have to wear a binder. You know I cried the other day; I think it was two weeks ago, I wore a tank top for the first time without a binder, and it was like, oh my god, oh my god, this is IT. As much as there's so much negativity around trans people we are living our best lives in some ways, you know what I mean? (Karabo, 32, trans man)

Karabo notes the moment where he "wore a tank top for the first time" as a moment of arrival, the "IT" moment of comfort not having to wear a binder anymore. The discourse of 'gender-specific bodies' has implication for how comfort and freedom in one's body is conceived; it makes possible particular moments that are marked as moments of freedom and as the marker of the 'right' body having finally been achieved.

The narratives analysed and discussed in this section show how trans masculine individuals in this study cite the 'gender-specific bodies' discourse to make sense of their gender and how bodies are implicated in the construction and performance of gender. The 'gender-specific bodies' discourse constructs bodies as somewhat passive and deterministic matter on the surface of which gender norms are impressed and materialised. While the discourse of 'gender-specific bodies' constructs certain bodies as 'normal' and thus intelligible and others as 'abnormal'. The kinds of bodies trans masculine bodies take is an effect of the power of the biological notion of the 'gender-specific bodies' discourse is lodged firmly in the logic of human biology that produces and

regulates sex and gender. Discourse is powerful in that it normalises behaviour (McLaren, 2002) and subjects the body to endless regulation, where the body ought to perpetually take the form of the gender category it is interpellated to.

The power of the discourse of gender-specific bodies is reinforced through the citation of heterosexual norms that construct the trans masculine body as masculine through the repudiation of femininity. The biological discourses of gender and how they impress upon the body are shown in the narratives as producing and legitimating a perceptible bodily notion of (normative) gender that trans masculine individual position themselves alongside to construct intelligible gender embodiment. The establishment of 'gender-specific bodies' is also a central feature of the discourse of medical transitioning, discussed in the following section, that is regulated by medical institutions.

II. Constituting trans masculinity through the discourse of medical transitioning

This section traces the power and authority of medical discourse in establishing and regulating the idea of gender as operating through a binary and how trans masculine participants in this study challenge or affirm the discourse of medical transitioning to inform their masculine subject position. The narratives that follow demonstrate how trans masculine individuals cite the discourse of medical transitioning to legitimate various trans masculine subject position. Furthermore, this section explores the implications of the discourse in the construction of intelligible masculinity.

The discourse of medical transitioning, framed as a movement from one gender identity to another, seeks to realign transgender subjectivities to the binary idea of masculinity or men, and femininity or women. "Medical and psychological studies have constructed particular ways of thinking about gender diversity which continue to inform social cultural and legal understandings of transgender" (Hines, 2007). Dysphoria is the general discomfort that trans people experience related to their body. Transitioning is often characterised as the process of moving from one end of the spectrum to the other, from female to male through medical interventions to masculinise the body. It is important here to note that not all trans individuals who transition seek to align with normative assumptions of gender. Most of the participants in the study drew from the discourses of medical transitioning that is premised on essentialist notions of gender, and dysphoria to explain their grappling with trans masculine embodiment and framing their ideal selves through medical processes of altering the body to appear more masculine.

The landscape of medical transitioning in South Africa is permeated by complexity and scarcity. Accessing gender affirmative healthcare in South Africa is complicated by the lack of adequate health care institutions. Public healthcare institutions require a diagnosis of gender dysphoria before an individual can access medical transitioning services or gender affirmative healthcare (Koch, McLachlan, Victor, Westcott, and Yager, 2019).

The participants in this study invoked the discourse of medical transitioning to support various positions and articulate the necessity of the process. For instance, Mike* below speaks about the potential that medical transitioning holds for his body:

> I need to do the medical transition because I know that will change my body, and I'm hoping that when that does happen, I'll have a better relationship with my body. I'll be able to look in the mirror. Because I don't look in the mirror, when I look in the mirror, I look at my face. When I walk past a place that has full body reflection, I look away because I don't think I'm looking at myself. (Mike*, 27, trans man)

Mike* draws from the discourse of medical transitioning to frame the kind of gender embodiment he desires. In this account, medical transitioning is constructed, with a degree of certainty, that it will "change" his body and this change are positioned positively. Medical transitioning is invoked will alter the appearance of the body and positioned to improve mikes relationship with his body. Mike's* statement shows the centrality of medical discourses in the construction of transgender knowledge. The medical discourse specifies and normalises how transgender is understood; as Hines (2007) argues that the medical discourse has worked on structuring specific understandings of transgender identity. Mike's* statement demonstrates how the body, its appearance, and how it is experienced is made sense of through the discourse of medical transitioning. Medical transitioning is privileged as the means through which Mike's* gender identity and his body can be reconciled. The reconciliation is also positioned as necessary for his relationship with his body so that he can be "able to look in the mirror". The implication of the discourse of transitioning on knowledges about gender diversity is that it shapes and truncates the vastness of gender embodiments and standardises the articulation and experience of transgender identity. Medical knowledges of gender normalise the idea of male and female bodies premised on hormonal differences (D'Angelo, 2018).

> I started thinking seriously about transitioning and how to go about it medically...I think I learned about the bits online like you have to see a therapist. (Luke, 29, trans man)

Luke speaks about "learning" about medical transitioning from the internet. The internet is constructed as a pedagogic space where information about the medical transition is available and accessible (Rooke, 2010). The figure of the therapist is also invoked as involved in the process of medical transitioning. The purpose of this articulation is explored in the statement below:

> I have medical aid, which has been very nice. So, I got my fifteen sessions with the psychiatrist…basically because I wanted to get all the information and just be able to speak to someone who knows what they are talking about. Because, I went to a gender psychologist, a whole gender psychologist, and they were so confused like what are you talking about. So, I got a really good psychiatrist, and obviously, she's very expensive. (Seth, 19, trans masculine)

Seth privileges medical transitioning by drawing upon the medical figures that administer and regulate the process. Seth spoke of having medical aid as "very nice" which allowed him to access a psychiatrist. Seth positions the psychiatrist as knowledgeable, "someone who knows what they are talking about", and thus as an authority on transgender knowledge. Seth also constructs the figure of a gender psychologist who is positioned as having been "confused", presumably about medical transitioning. Also, Seth invokes the cost that is attached to getting "all the information" from someone knowledgeable. Consider the comment: "I got a really good psychiatrist obviously she's very expensive". The psychiatrist is spoken of as "good" and "expensive".

The citing and privileging of medical transitioning through knowledgeable and "good" psychiatrist invokes the authoritative discourse of psychiatry which legitimates and validates the psychiatrist as an expert in transgender knowledge. Seth's preference for the "good psychiatrist" over the "confused" gender psychologist also legitimates the psychiatrist as an expert in transgender knowledges. There is also an implicit construction of the psychiatrist as an expert through the conflation of "good" with "expensive". The implication of the positioning of the psychiatrist as an expert on transgender knowledges draws from the powerful discourse of psychiatry to construct "objective" truths about identity (Hines, 2010). The psychiatrist becomes expert through the "pedagogic role and her role as intermediary in the diffusion of medical knowledge" (Foucault, 1979:59). The discourse of psychiatry produces knowledge about transgender identity and standardises the process of medical transitions through therapy sessions, medical diagnoses, and physical treatment (D'Angelo, 2018). The economic discourse of medical transitioning is also cited to demonstrate the cost associated with accessing transitioning services (Lenning and Buist, 2013).

Constructing trans masculinity through the discourse of medical transitioning, psychiatry has strong implications for trans masculine subjectivity. The authoritative knowledges of psychiatry embed what modes of recognition that trans masculine subjectivity takes. It informs the way trans masculine individuals recognise themselves "at the level of feeling, desire and the body"

(Butler, 2004:58). Consider the following narrative on the process of accessing medical transitioning:

> I spoke to a doctor, and she told me that public would be a better way to go. She wanted me to come for further consultation and talk about how it's going to work; you know in the public health system here in Cape Town because I already started the process in Jo'burg… you know like you have to do 6 months at (name of a public hospital) for therapy for you to get hormones. Because you need a certain number of visits, so they have like group sessions. So, my friend gave me a form and said fill this in, and they'll give you a call for a psych assessment. So, they basically wanna know you really wanna do this. (Mike*, 27, trans man)

Mike* speaks of medical transitioning from the perspective of the "public healthcare system" which is constructed as "the better way to go". That public healthcare as "the better way to go" is also constructed through considerations of location. Mike* also comments on the process involved in accessing transitioning services and the time requirement attached to it: "you know like you have to do 6 months at (name of a public hospital) for therapy for you to get hormones". The discourses of public health and location are drawn upon to describe the complexity of the process of transitioning. Public healthcare in South Africa is limited in the provision of medical transition services. Koch et al., (2019:5) state that there are only two clinics in the public healthcare sector, one in Cape Town and another in Pretoria, that specialise in transgender health, including hormone replacement therapy and most surgeries. The shortage of competent healthcare facilities that provide gender affirmative healthcare complicates the desire to medically transition for those who require it.

The implication of this discourse of public healthcare and location to trans masculinity is that medical transitioning is positioned as spatially restricted, time-consuming, and somewhat exclusive. Access to private healthcare is complicated by economic discourses; about 16 per cent of the South African population have medical aid and the majority of people rely on public healthcare (StatsSA, 2018:25). Thus, the discourse of public healthcare and location function together to constitute medical transitioning as a restricted and regulated process that has powerful effects for trans masculine subjectivity. It restricts trans masculine subjectivity to particular modes of appearance that are spatially defined. Despite the complexity of the process, medical transitioning is still positioned as central to the construction of trans masculinity. Medical

transitioning is constructed through complementary discourses that determine how the process is positioned and accessed.

> The process to get hormones here (In Cape Town) is just harder, and I told my partner that I don't have the stamina for it, I don't have the stamina to sit in a room with a therapist who is going to psychoanalyse me and tell me that well maybe or… let me explore for myself. (Lee, 23, non-binary)

Lee constructs the process to get hormones as "harder" and requiring "stamina" to be able to access. Lee constructs the process to get hormone through the lens of psychoanalytic therapy. Psychoanalytic discourses of gender have, historically, constructed transgender identity through the lens of pathology, which continues to inform current processes that require a diagnosis in order for trans people to access medical transiting services. It is important to note here that in 2018, transgender was declassified as a mental illness (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Lee draws from a counter-discourse of gender as self-determined to affirm and validate their self-exploration of trans masculinity.

> I've been on T for over a year now, since April last year. I really have an amazing team; I'm seeing Dr (redacted), my psychologist, she's amazing, and also my doctor, Dr (redacted), who does the hormones and stuff. I felt like it was a matter of life and death, and I have no regrets. So I don't care if I have to pay till like I'm 90, but for me to be happy and be who I am, especially at night when I'm about to sleep thinking, Karabo – it's worth it. (Karabo, 32, trans man).

Karabo describes his experience of medical transitioning through testosterone therapy in a positive light. Karabo speaks of the doctors administering the process as "an amazing team". Karabo constructs the process of medical transitioning as "a matter of life and death". The discourse of medical transitioning is cited in this narrative as central to the preservation of life, as lifesaving and affirming of trans masculine subjectivity.

For those trans masculine participants who had begun medical transitioning, the effects of the process were accounted for in various ways. For instance, Seth spoke of how being on testosterone therapy has affected him:

> Monthly stuff it's been better since I've been on T, because like also there's bottom growth. Everyone is like, well I recently found out about it also, and it happens really quickly, like within the first two days you can see a significant

> difference. It is weird, but in a way, it makes me feel less dysphoric. (Seth, 19, trans masculine)

Seth constructs testosterone therapy as helping to alleviate feelings of dysphoria. Testosterone therapy contributes to the cessation of menses and the growth of the clitoris (Klein, Krane, and Paule-Koba, 2018). The medical transitioning discourse drawn upon in Seth's narrative above focuses on the biological processes of the body that reify particular constructions of sex and gender. Again, biological processes in the body become a marker of the success or failure of medical transitioning to achieve 'true' masculinity or maleness. The medical transitioning discourse is drawn upon to articulate a trans masculine subject position that privileges the body and how the body conforms to masculine norms. Consider Karabo's statement below:

> I was really scared to transition, scared of letting go of everything that I've known and everything that I've been...I was really scared like what if I make that decision that's gonna fuck me over, I still have fears now but what helps now is I can genuinely wake up and seriously stand in front of the mirror and be like ok you're getting there like I can genuinely smile and be like yay! I actually like the guy that's looking back at me like I can see where I'm going, and I like where I'm going. (Karabo, 32, trans man)

In this statement, Karabo underscores the significance of medical transitioning to his masculine subjectivity, to becoming the guy he desired to be. Butler's (1993, 1990) conceptualisation of gender as performative is also associated with the circulation and production of particular kinds of affect - melancholia, loss, mourning. Karabo's narrative underscores the mourning and fear of "letting go" that is involved in the process of medical transitioning. There's a sense in which medical transitioning could be posited as a "spectre of loss", nevertheless a necessary loss that carves the way towards desired gender embodiment. Karabo's narrative illustrates the mourning, conflict, and confusion that haunts the self-constitution through the medical discourses of gender and thus the enactment of trans masculine subjectivity.

In summary, this section presented the findings relating to how participants understand and construct masculine subject positions. Most participants cited the prominent discourse of medical transitioning for various reasons, including reconciling the body with felt gender and tending towards masculine embodiment. The participants also invoked the medical transitioning discourse to account for a desire to improve their relationship with their body and how their body looks. Another important aspect coming out of the participants' narratives is the trust and confidence they

show towards medical transitioning to bring about their desired bodies. This attests to the power of gender norms embedded within the discourse of medical transitioning that normalises certain forms of gender embodiment and regulate how trans masculine individuals' access and make use of such services. While the discourse of medical transitioning was prominent in the narratives, some participants challenged the authority of medical knowledges that validate transgender identity. Drawing from less powerful discourses, some participants critiqued the seeming bureaucracy (Klein, 2009:18) involved in the process of medical transitioning opting for self-determined ways to explore and navigate their trans masculinity.

The individual discourses employed to make sense of medical transitioning are entangled in a dynamic of power, where medical knowledges of gender establish the conditions for medical transitioning. "Becoming" a man or embodying normative masculinity is posited by some participant as a way to remedy the disconnect they feel in their bodies. Medical transitioning is deemed necessary to attaining masculinity. Drawing from this discourse signifies essentialist notions of gender that while they are desired, still conform to cisnormative ideals (Worthen, 2016). The implication of the discourse of medical transitioning is the normalisation of particular knowledges and institutions as authoritative in delineating the contours of possible and legitimate trans masculine subjectivities. The medical practices that construct the 'natural' body as masculine mark the body and compel the body to bear the weight of reproducing the 'correct' stylisation and performance of masculinity. Medical discourses of transgender identity inform the various technologies available to individuals who wish to transition medically. The stratified access to transitioning services calls into question the possibility of embodying masculinity at all which the authoritative and powerful medical discourses of transgender identity predominantly rest upon. Medical discourses hold the key to particular truths of trans subjectivity. Understanding how the participants do or do not take up subject positions of masculinity and what they gain from action or inaction (as in the case of choosing not to transition medically) underscores the competing knowledges that inform trans masculinity and the varied ways in which trans masculinity is understood and performed.

The next section presents the analysis and discussion of the discourse of patriarchal masculinity and how it is drawn upon to inform various trans masculine subject positions. The section also looks at counter-discourses that are cited by the participants to validate their performance of masculinity.

III. Constructing trans masculinity as counter- and anti-patriarchal

This section looks at the discourses the participants cite to construct trans masculinity as counter patriarchal or outside of the patriarchal contours of masculinity. To contextualise the narratives that follow, it is important to note the kind of society within which the trans masculine individuals in this study navigate and perform masculinity. South African society is conceptualised and operates through the dominant discourse of patriarchy that shapes and regulates the landscape of gender (Gqola, 2007:113-114). Gender is constructed through the binary of man or woman, and patriarchal norms dictate how gender subjectivities are embodied and performed. Transgender people navigate this landscape and negotiate livable embodiments in contexts where their existence is epistemically unimaginable. The participants in this study reflected upon the effects of the social context the live in as they try to navigate trans masculine embodiment. The narratives that follow draw attention to how the participants draw from challenge and subvert the dominant discourse of patriarchal masculinity. The narratives illustrate the effects of patriarchal discourse on the construction of trans masculinity and navigating public spaces.

Constituting anti-patriarchal masculinity

Reflecting on the kind of masculinity they embody the participants in this study drew from their experiences of being socialised into a cis-heteropatriarchal society. Below, Seth grapples with his masculine identity in relation to the context he is situated in:

> Living as a female and seeing what females have to go through is difficult. Like it's difficult to swap sides. There was a huge part of me that was scared of white males. I've got this huge fear of rape, although I've never personally experienced any sexual assault or anything…like now to be the person that you're scared of…and like if I look in the mirror and with my dysphoria and stuff…it's like an internal battle. Do I want to stay unhappy with myself and not become what I'm scared of…I don't know? (Seth, 19, trans masculine)

Seth draws from his experiences "living as a female" and constructs his trans masculine subjectivity as a kind of "swop" and positions it as a "difficult" thing to make sense of. Seth draws upon the discourses of "fear", "rape" and white masculinity articulated through the notion of "white male" to position the possibility of embodying masculinity as already implicated in the frame of violent masculinity. Further, Seth considers the difficulty of 'swopping sides' through the notion of "dysphoria" and constructs the choice he has "to stay unhappy with myself and not become what I'm scared of" and a kind of "internal battle". Grappling with lived experience and

the possibility of inhabiting dominant yet violent masculine subjectivity is a significant consideration for some trans masculine individuals (Green, 2005). The critical reflexivity and grappling with the available forms of masculine subject positions is navigated in relation to the dominant patriarchal discourse of masculinity.

Trans masculinity is made sense of and navigated through various discourses that complicate the navigation of non-violent masculinity. For instance, trans masculinity is shaped through fear as informed by lived experiences and socialisation to the female sex role. Seth draws upon a dominant discourse of violent masculinity to position embodying masculinity as already implicated in the potential of becoming or being seen through the lens of violence. In the narrative below, trans masculinity is constituted through multiple discourses that cohere to delineate the possible articulations of masculinity that do not rely on violence and domination for intelligibility and legitimacy.

> I was scared for the longest time of umuntu wes'lisa [a man], besides my dad – he's an amazing guy. I had a lot of sexual abuse happen to me when I was a child, and to me, I felt like transitioning would betray who I am somehow. Like you become lowo muntu wes'lisa [that kind of man] who does wrong things. I felt like…what if I become a monster. (Karabo, 32, trans man)

Karabo grapples with his embodiment of normative masculinity, achieved through transitioning, as a kind of betrayal of the person he is. The betrayal is positioned through the possibility of becoming or embodying violent masculinity, drawing from his experiences of sexual violence and fear of men.

Drawing from the discourses of fear, sexual abuse, violent masculinity, Karabo positions his transitioning to masculinity or maleness as something that could amount to a betrayal of his personhood. Again, the discourses of fear and violence are drawn upon conjure a picture of normative patriarchal masculinity that is framed as undesirable and scary for trans masculinity to be positioned or position themselves within. The discourse of patriarchal masculinity circumscribes the possible modes of embodying and performing masculinity; it truncates the wide array of masculine subject positions and makes available and privileges violent and hierarchical forms of masculinity. As shown in the narrative above, patriarchal masculinity complicate trans masculine subjectivity.

For some participants in the study, challenging the idea if masculinity as something men do was significant for making sense of their masculine subject positions. Consider Henry's statement below:

> It feels like masculinity is theirs, no one else can have it except men like how did we get to that, that's my question how did we get here? How did we get here, to this point that masculinity belongs to them that's why I'm saying I've been told to stay in my lane, and I'm like masculinity suits me quite well to be honest because in essence my energy, I feel like my energy is masculine maybe it's the energy more than just what I'm wearing, my energy makes them ask what is it with you. (Henry, 28, non-binary)

Henry challenges the patriarchal discourse of masculinity that constructs masculinity as a men's prerogative and challenges the idea of masculinity as communicated through distinct styles of dress. Henry invokes a construction of masculinity as more than dress; masculinity as an energy.

Masculinity constructed as a men's prerogative has significant effects for how trans masculine individuals negotiate their masculine subjectivity and how they perform masculinity is various spaces.

> In general, I just feel uncomfortable around cisgender men. I don't know it's like in some way I feel scared of them, not entirely sure why. I go to 12 step meetings, and I've been to some meetings where it's been like 100% men or like one woman. And I used to feel extremely anxious in those meetings because I just…for some reason it feels like cisgender men would have a more hostile reaction to a transgender person than a cisgender woman might. (Luke, 29, trans man)

Luke constructs his experiences of being around "cisgender men" as uncomfortable and speaks of feeling "scared of them". Luke draws from the discursive space of "12 step meetings" to frame his feelings around cisgender men as potentially more "hostile" to trans identities than cisgender women. Luke draws from the notions of fear and transphobia to demonstrate his experience with/of cisgender masculinities.

Drawing from the discourse of cis-heterosexism, I suggest that Luke constructs his trans masculine subjectivity as constrained by the possibility of hostility towards his identity. The discourse of transphobia, an object of cis-heterosexism, works to discipline how and where transgender identity can appear and operates through inciting fear and anxiety to limit the liveability of transgender subjectivity, particularly in public configurations of space. Fear, as

Ahmed (2004:8) writes, shapes the surfaces of bodies in relation to objects. As such, transphobia is a disciplinary object of cisgender masculine norms and thus shapes the experience and expression of trans masculinity.

Below, Lee explicates the disciplinary questioning of their gender as they move in different spaces:

> The environment reacts kindly to cis-passing transmen because then they're just assumed as men and that is what they want and that is what they receive…but it's different when they think you're some kind of queer, but they can't place you because now the questioning becomes dangerous (Lee, 23, non-binary)

The environment shaped by cis-heteropatriarchal norms already absorbs and compels gender normativity. Cis-hetero norms shape the configurations of space and make intelligible bodies that extend the norms and modes of being in that space (Ahmed, 2006). Lee draws from a discourse of genderism to articulate the effect of embodying an unintelligible gender, appearing as "some kind of queer" is considered as dangerous.

Discourses of genderism evident in the narrative below, complicate knowledges about gender diversity:

> Yoh! it was risky it was scary, not a day I felt I was safe. Even when I'm going out, I'd have to make sure that I have a crew just to make sure I'm safe, I'm comfortable. I used to smoke cigarettes, and there were people if I'd walk alone…there was this guy who was like, ok wena ucinga uzophatha apheKas'lam? Awazi ndim ophetheyo apha, and you're like this [so you think you're going to rule in my neighbourhood, don't you know that I'm the one in charge here]and now you're smoking, aren't you aware that I'm the only guy who's allowed to walk around smoking and everything. (Buhle, 23, trans man)

Buhle constructs embodying masculinity in the residential space he lived in as "scary", "risky" and unsafe. Buhle positions his navigation of space and embodying trans masculinity through his experiences of hostility and aggression he was confronted with. Buhle draws on the notions of safety to position his performance and embodiment of masculinity as framed through disruption and dominance. Buhle gestures at the discourse of cis-heteropatriarchy where men are positioned as being "in charge". This discourse operates through configurations of space as inherently cis-heteronormative. The statement positions men, cisgender men, as being "in charge" of particular spaces and thus dictate the modes through which other genders appear in order to

maintain their dominance. Ratele (2016:5) argues that the two key categories against which traditional heterosexual manhood defines itself are 'woman' and 'queer'. Patriarchal gender norms discipline the configurations of space to maintain the assumed gender coherence of the space. Trans masculinity is navigated through the considerations of cis-heterosexist configurations of space:

> I've had one or two issues with my ID saying female and passing as a guy and getting kicked out of places. This one place in (name of the suburb), it's quite Afrikaans, so I came in, and I was literally taking a photo with someone, and the bouncer pulled me out, and he didn't wanna tell me why. He kept saying you're underage. And I'm like here's my ID, and he was speaking to the manager saying this is a guy, but the ID says female. (Seth, 19, Trans masculine)

Seth frames navigating trans masculinity through the "issue" of having the "female" gender marker on his identity document and "passing as a guy". Seth illustrates how the issue has led to him being kicked out of age-restricted establishments that constructed him as "underage" even though he met the age restrictions. Seth considers the reason he was removed from the establishment despite meeting the age restriction through the discourse of genderism. The discourse of genderism operates through "instances of discrimination that are based on the discontinuities between sex with which an individual identifies and how others in a variety of spaces read their sex" (Browne, 2007:331). The discourse of genderism "pulls" trans masculinity out of public visibility. The notions of age, legality and genderism cohere to "pull" trans masculinity out of public visibility.

The navigation of trans masculinity in public spaces reflected on below:

> Most day it's kind of anxiety-inducing. When I travel the looks I get and the things I hear…I've had things occur to me on the street especially with like black men. They are the ones who make me feel anxious. Sometimes I'm ok; I'm in the house preparing and getting dressed saying this is what I'm going to pitch today. And then I step outside, and that fear just takes over until I get to my office and I'm like whew! You know most people when they see me on the street, they ask is this a girl or a man. Travel is not fun; it gives me a lot of anxiety. (Henry, 28, non-binary)

Henry speaks about the experience of travelling to work as "anxiety-inducing". Henry frames anxiety as incited by the 'looks' they get, and things said and done to them "on the street". Henry cites this fear gripping them when they navigate public space and constructs the reaction

they get from "black men" through the experience of anxiety. The notion of fear and anxiety are drawn on in Henry's account conjure a picture of how trans masculinity is experienced in public spaces. Consider the following comment: "I step outside, and that fear just takes over until I get to my office and I'm like whew!". This comment suggests how fear is a response to an already present and felt the threat of cis-heterosexist violence. Fear involves the anticipation of hurt or injury (Ahmed, 2006:65). The distribution of cis-heterosexist violence was reported to be spatially constrained. Below, Lee narrates their experience of navigating public transportation:

> Both my partner and I were living in the township in (name of a township redacted), and we would take public transportation because it's cheaper and we didn't have a car. The number of times I've been harassed, or we've been harassed together was so much so that I wouldn't walk out of the house anymore because I'd get triggered. I couldn't leave the house. When I did travel, I'd Uber from the front gate to wherever I'm going and from wherever I'm going to the front gate. But walking in public was not a thing. (Lee, 23, non-binary)

Lee constructs their navigation of public transportation as a trans masculine person through the experience of harassment. Lee describes walking out of the house as triggering and mentions that "walking in public was not a thing". Spaces are generative and reflective of gendered identities and sexualities (Odfield and Tucker, 2019:5). Fear could be considered to work as a mechanism through which gender norms and the gender hegemony of spaces stays in place. Gender norms intersect with notions of public space and public transportation to circumscribe the field within which trans masculinity can appear, if at all. The tyranny of gender in public spaces and public transportation narrows the movement of trans masculine individuals, it closes in on the spaces they can successfully navigate and the spaces they can access without unwittingly 'standing out' and being made to feel unsafe. Patriarchal norms of gender operate through the body to trigger responses that make it difficult to navigate public spaces (Kiguwa and Langa, 2017). Consider the following statement:

> I've had people that told me "stay in your lane". I've literally had people say those words, stay in your lane the world was designed for people to be or live particular lives, and this is not it. Sometimes it brings me down, and sometimes I get fire inside me that tells me I'm going to defy this. That's why I continue to embrace and move into spaces I want to move in regardless of how I'm going to be defined. I'm not going to suppress myself because you're not comfortable with it. (Henry, 28, non-binary)

Henry's statement shows how gender embodiment is constructed as being out of line. They mentioned being told by people to "stay in your lane". Henry positions themselves as defiant and intentional and moves into any space they want to move in.

Drawing from concepts of resistance and defiance Henry constructs their embodiment and performance of masculinity through an insistence to move within spaces "regardless of how I'm going to be defined". The dominance and sedimentation of gender norms in spaces do not preclude the resistance to or rejection of gender norms, as the condition of power (Foucault, 1980) is that it produces not docile bodies but resistance bodies. Trans masculinity is positioned as being constrained by patriarchal gender norms. Some trans masculine participants draw from experiences of work and medical transitioning to articulate their masculine subject position:

> I remember having a conversation with my boss. I remember telling them it's wrong to see things a particular way and then they're like you must remember now that you're transitioning, you're a man, you can't be on both sides of the fence, you're on our side. So, I'm like what do you mean? I'm on the right side, what you're doing is wrong and I'm telling you it is wrong. It's like I'm expected to now be in solidarity with them, and yoh hey they're just on their own there hey because I'm not gonna change. (Karabo, 32, trans man)

For some participants, it was expected of them to perform particular kinds of masculinity to show their alignment with or subscription to a normative notion of masculinity. The narrative above shows the resistance towards dominant articulations of masculinity and positioning trans masculinity outside of the normative forms of masculinity. Trans masculine individuals draw from counter discourses and challenge masculine norms to create subject positions that diverge from normative masculinity. Trans masculinity is also constructed as challenging hegemonic norms of masculinity. Similarly, Helman and Ratele (2018) report that "non-conventional gender identities have the potential to destabilise a particular version of masculinity, including violent masculinities". Consider Henry's comment below on how their masculinity is reacted to in various spatial configurations:

> My masculinity and I say this often that I can see how my masculinity makes black men especially uncomfortable they don't like it…I feel that energy, as soon as they see me and see that I'm comfortable, I told you that sometimes I feel like a superhero, I'm having a lovely day and then I'll go past a group of guys and then you know I can see the look of how dare you, I think that's the perfect way to describe it like how dare you. Like I can see it in their eyes like how dare you

> have the audacity to walk down the street dressed like that. (Henry, 28, non-binary)

Henry constructs the reaction they get towards their masculinity through the "looks" they get. Henry specifically invokes "black men" as being particularly uncomfortable because of Henry's masculine embodiment. There is emphasis on the gaze Henry reports they are subject to: "I can see it in their eyes". The narrative also shows how, in some ways, Henry anticipates the gaze of others in the space they move in. One can argue that the gaze, the "look of how dare you", is an object of patriarchal norms that serves to discipline the body and how it ought to appear in public spaces. The body again is invoked as an object for the impression of patriarchal gender norms through which gender is regulated. The gaze initiates fear that leads to the trans masculine individual to self-regulate.

Consider Seth's comment below:

> If I'm in a group of like girls or women, then I'd behave more consciously, but like if I'm with a group of guys and then they're for example looking at a chick, I'm not going to stand there and look in the opposite direction or something, I'll kinda do what they do to like fit in more um but if they do something that is really out of line then I'll call them out on it but not to the degree that I'll be called out myself. Like if they don't know that I'm trans. (Seth, 19, trans masculine)

Navigating masculinity for some participants is contingent on how they appear and behave around other people. Seth illustrates how he navigates intelligible masculinity by aligning with masculinity norms when in the company of other men. Normative masculinity is invoked to validate his masculinity position. The extent to which Seth challenges masculine norms is seen to depend on his masculinity being challenged on the basis of being transgender. Seth invokes the potential of losing the respect of other men and potentially being perceived as not man enough.

The findings demonstrate a variety of ways in which the participants navigate their masculinity in relation to dominant discourse of patriarchal masculinity. Participants inconsistently drew from and challenged normative patriarchal masculine norms. A clear indication of this inconsistency of citing patriarchal masculine norms was evident when some participants aligned with the stereotypical male behaviours, being in a group of guys and "staring at a chick" to affirm and perform acceptable and intelligible masculine behaviour. Masculinity expressions in the South African context are diverse and are primarily influenced by patriarchal

gender norms. Navigating trans masculinity at the backdrop of this gender reality is seen through how the participants position themselves alongside acceptable masculine norms to negotiate liveable masculinity. The legal affirmation and protection of queer subjectivities has led to increased visibility of queer identities in public spaces. The disruption of the hegemony of patriarchal masculinities and femininities has led to increased violence perpetrated against queer individuals (Msibi, 2012; Rothmann, 2018).

Navigating Normativity

Navigating public spaces for non-binary participants in the study was constructed as particularly challenging and dangerous. Some participants in the study considered different modes of gender embodiment to negotiate a liveable masculine subjectivity through various techniques. the narratives show that trans masculine individuals unwillingly choose to forgo an authentic expression of their gender, to conform to the binary expression of gender.

> So my thing is I have to either be cispassing man or cispassing woman but I can't look like I'm in the middle…I can't look confusing because that becomes dangerous for me and so I've been having this conversation with my partner as well I'm like do I just "detransition" or do I just stay on T and just look like cispassing man get top surgery then no questions about it, go out into the world and I'm this man and I'm proud of my manhood or whatever…and I don't want either, but because of the landscape we live in I have to decide. (Lee, 23, non-binary)

Lee talks about considering "passing" for a "cis" person to navigate their gender safely. Passing is the ability to conform to cisgender norms (Begun and Kattari, 2016). Lee laments the "landscape" they live in and positions it as unwelcoming and dangerous to ambiguous gender embodiments. The persistence of patriarchal norms in South Africa dictate the landscape of gender and how transgender individuals navigate public spaces. The narrative reveals the abiding discourse of genderism as it interacts with patriarchal norms of masculinity. The effect of both discourses, I argue, positions non-binary masculinity at odds with survival. As shown in the narrative, Lee considers conformity to gender norms to negotiate a liveable masculine embodiment.

On the one hand, the embeddedness of the gender binary in the fabric of society makes it impossible to live (however dangerous) the 'truth' of ones trans masculine subjectivity, while conforming to the unyielding gender norm invalidates the trans masculine identity that does not

seek conformity. The effect of cis-heteropatriarchal norms casts a shadow of doubt on trans masculinity and the form of embodiment acceptable and possible to embody. Another example of the complexity presented by the hegemony of gendered spaces in the navigation and performance of masculinity:

> It's really frustrating and invasive and it got me to a point where I'm like maybe I need to get my breasts removed but I don't want to get them removed for myself it's just that I'm tired of people looking at my chest like that. Sometimes I wanna go out without wearing anything underneath the t-shirt and it's like I'm gonna be looked at now, and I wanna be comfortable, being comfortable is important. I sometimes think that maybe life would be easier if I didn't have breasts and I ask myself would I be doing that for myself or am I doing it because of how other people are like. Because, I don't think I have a problem with my body I'm very much ok with everything I've got and then like I feel like I'm second guessing myself because of what or how people are towards me, those are the things I experience. (Henry, 28, non-binary)

As can be seen in Henry's narrative, the bodily experience of gender in space is implicated in the indissoluble tangle of sedimented cultural histories that shape the appearance gendered body. The body as a specific locus of gendered experience unravels the sedimented history of gender norms that shape the body's appearance in the social sphere. Heteronormative discourses regulate the way of looking at and over bodies, categorising some bodies as normal and others as queer or abject (Caudwell, 2014). The power of the gender binary compels an individual to 'choose' an intelligible that is cisgender male masculine expression that requires the complete evacuation of any signs of femininity or risk the possibility of annihilation. This false choice dichotomy presents no livable option for the trans masculine individual.

Transgender bodies reveal themselves as both disrupting the sedimented cultural field of cisnormative objects. For example,

> It was never safe for me (name of township), that's why I decided you know what I need a peaceful place even if mhlambe [maybe] they are going to say jonga ezaz'tabane [look at those faggots] but I know that they won't do anything but in (name of township) you felt like umtu [a person] actually would literally beat me up. Here (in the new place) of course they don't say anything to me…here there are people who make me feel even comfortable. There are people here who see me how I see myself, who don't see me as a girl ya. So here there's a big change…there are people who understand me without even having to explain myself first – even if I walk alone, people who don't know I'm in a relationship,

> people who don't know where I live but see this one is a with us, he is one of us. (Buhle, 23, trans man)

The narratives above to bear the centrality of the disciplinary configuration of space and what the body is expected to look like and what/how much space it ought to take up. Often, being in public spaces can become extremely uncomfortable and become a threat to the lives of visibly gender non-conforming people. Trans masculine individuals' experience of public spaces underscores the tyranny of cis-heteropatriarchal constructions of gender and the normalisation of the illusion of the cis- homogeneity configuration of space. It is important to note that the point of contention in the confrontation of masculinity is located within a hierarchy of gender power that seeks to reinstate men at the top and the sole custodians of masculinity. Masculinity's relation to gender power maintains its hierarchy by placing itself above femininity. It is interesting to note the coming together of cis-masculinities and trans masculinities and the dynamic or the circumstance under which cis-masculinities pose themselves as a threat to trans masculinities.

> Sometimes I look in the mirror and I'm like maybe something is wrong, and I know that I shouldn't because most days I'm like NO I'm great I like this person, and you know words really stick, they're powerful and the way that people perceive me affects the way that. I wanna navigate space and I also wanna keep myself safe so I tell myself sometimes because I've had so many incidents from people attacking me, people throwing things at me you know long list of terrible things but because of wanting to avoid that and avoid people trying to figure me out um then I'm like maybe I need to change something but then at the same time if I'm saying I wanna change something then I'm saying there's something wrong with me. The problem is not with me, or me, it's them. (Henry, 28, non-binary)

Throughout the narratives presented in this section, participants grapple with their masculine embodiment which does not conform to normative articulations and performances of masculinity. The threat of cis- hetero masculinity is upheld by discourses of genderism, not by a specific cohort of people. The power of the discourse of cis-hetero masculinities is are scattered and manifests in different modulations as an exercise of different mechanisms of power, from penetrating staring, passing incendiary remarks, and threats and acts of physical and symbolic violence. Writing in *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, Foucault (1978:44) explicates power's ability to "take charge of sexuality…caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatising troubled moments". For Foucault (1980), power is articulated as wrapping (violently) the body in its embrace. The same mechanism, I argue is present in the regulation and repression

of trans masculinity in space; the different modalities of cis-heteronormative power work to punish and discipline bodies that appear "out of line" leaving at its wake a constellation of embodied affect. The participants draw from the medical knowledges to consider embodying normative, intelligible masculinity. Navigating normativity is considered at the backdrop of threats and acts of violence that some of the participants in this study have experienced because of their gender embodiment.

Shifting expressions: masculinity without 'men'

Common understandings of masculinity locate masculinity within the notion of male bodies and masculinity as something that only men do.

> Now that I have started transitioning I don't feel as like anti being feminine I feel a bit hesitant to dress in a feminine way because I think like people would look at me weirdly and stuff, but sometimes I'd have on nail polish, and sometimes I feel like wearing make-up but that's a bit strange because when I wasn't presenting as male I never wanted to wear make-up. It's getting a bit more confusing. (Luke, 29, trans man)

Luke comments that medically transitioning has made him less anti-feminine. Luke grapples with a desire to "dress in a feminine way" in relation to how he would be reacted to by others. Luke makes an interesting comment which serves to demonstrate the fluidity of gender expression: "sometimes I feel like wearing make-up but that's a bit strange because when I wasn't presenting as male, I never wanted to wear make-up. It's getting a bit more confusing". This comment appears to be constructing the shifting feelings towards gender expression as "strange". This caveat can be understood as the effect of the disciplinary power of gender norms and self-regulation where Luke frames the apparent 'inconsistency' of gender identity and gender expression as "confusing", as though it is not supposed to be reconciled now.

Foucault (1979) speaks of disciplinary practices through the idea of internalisation – gender norms discipline the body through repeated citation of norms (Butler, 1990) that result in the sticking and sedimentation of the norm. Gender norms are internalised and become self-regulating.

> I was on T long enough for people to start treating me as a man. I thought I wanted that, genuinely. And when I started getting that I was like I don't like this at all, I'm very uncomfortable. This is not how I see myself. (Lee, 23, non-binary)

Transgender individuals sometimes undergo testosterone therapy to reconcile their felt gender and how their bodies appear. Testosterone therapy masculinises the body; the body takes the shape of normative cis-masculinity norms. The statement demonstrates how Lee constructs being treated like "a man" as being "uncomfortable". Embodying normative masculinity brings discomfort, displaces the idea of the self. Testosterone materialises the body through a masculine ideal that is privileged in cis-heteropatriarchal societies. Inhabiting the ideal, to use Ahmed's (2006) words, can make one feel uneasy – especially when the one does not constitute or define themselves through that ideal, as shown in Lee's comment. Trans masculinity exists beyond the masculine ideal, as experienced and performed outside the normative masculinity discourse.

Again, trans masculinity is considered through the 'comfort or 'discomfort' notion of inhabiting ideal patriarchal masculinity. The discourse of medical transition makes the ideal masculinity possible and reinforce the binary articulation and performance of masculinity, which then implies that trans masculine subjectivity only becomes intelligible and thus can 'exist' within the binary. The further implication of the latter is described in Henry's account below.

> The perception is I'm trying to be a man, and people just assume, and you find that out in conversations. Because I wear a suit for work, essentially, I'm a stockbroker so there's a particular dress code which perfectly suits me. I like it. Sometimes I'd be sitting with people, and they'd be like oh 'he' and I'm like no don't assume that I'm masculine presenting that I'm trying to fit into the 'he' box. So, they just perceive me as someone who is trying to be a man. I'm constantly being misgendered in the workplace. You get those who use 'she' and you get those who use 'he'. I get whiplash every time someone misgenders me, so I find it very difficult. (Henry, 28, Non-binary)

Henry describes how their masculinity is constructed perceived through the assumption that they are "trying to be a man". The assumption, Henry, states is based on their dress style and masculine presentation. Henry constructs being misgendered through the use of normative gender specifying pronouns that echoed a binary idea of gender. Henry describes the effect of being misgendered as: "I get whiplash every time someone misgenders me". Butler (2011) argues that "bodies are not mute life forces that counter existing modalities of power; rather, they are modalities of power, embodied interpretations, engaging in allied action". The intersection of gender and space is pronounced in the experiences of trans masculine individuals whose gender expression/body does not fit the neither the stereotypical masculine nor feminine Henry draws

from the notion of misgendering, the act of interpellating someone into a gender identity that they do not identify with, to describes the effect of embodying masculinity without identifying as a man. Misgendering is a form of misrecognition that reduces trans masculine subjectivity to a form of non-being. Philosopher, Charles Taylor (1997:25) writes in *The Politics of Recognition*, that "misrecognition or non-recognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being". In the sphere of binary gender discourse, misrecognition or misgendering functions as a particular property of transgender subjectivities that are not articulated through normative enunciations of gender.

Constructing affective masculinity: discourses of care, emotionality and fatherhood

In the book *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love*, bell hooks (2004:60) writes that "patriarchy demands of men that they become and remain emotional cripples". Patriarchal discourses of masculinities construct emotional incapacity in men as a sign of strength and the emotional expression to be a sign of weakness.

> My masculinity looks like a lot of caring and just a lot of raw emotion. I think that's one of the things I still struggle with the most, dealing with my emotions and feeling weak if I have emotions. It's like an external thing. Like if I show emotion, they are gonna like to doubt me. (Seth, 19, trans masculine)

Seth constructs his masculinity through the notion of care and 'raw emotion' and positions himself as struggling with "feeling weak if I have emotion". Showing emotion is framed as potentially devaluing/discrediting his masculinity.

Seth's statement shows that he draws from the discourses of care and emotion/affect to position his trans masculinity as caring and capable of expressing emotion. On the other hand, emotionality is constructed as being constrained by the ideas of being doubted or constructed as weak. The fear of being doubted constrains the expression of trans masculinity. The discourse of patriarchal masculinity circumscribes the emotional dimension and threatens the legitimacy and validity of trans masculinity. As such, the display of emotions is constructed as some kind of weakness and threatens the visibility or 'truth' of trans masculinity.

> My partner and I have been together for eight years. At first, I'd find it hard to communicate how I'm feeling and obviously being in the dark about what is going on with me is not fair to her. But, being with her, I don't know what

> happened, or what she did, but I'm able to say it out when I'm not ok. (Karabo, 32, trans man)

Karabo's statement constructs the embracing of emotionality and talking about his feelings as being improved by being in a relationship. Masculine identified people embracing emotion or feeling and being able to talk about their emotions troubles the normative assumption that men or masculine-identified people must be stoic and that that is a sign of strength. Drawing from notions of emotionality and communication positions Karabo as being orientated towards emotionally reflexive masculinity that rejects patriarchal norms of emotionality.

Another construction of trans masculine individuals draw their ideas of masculinity from is the discourse of fatherhood articulated through notions of fathers or men as providers and protectors were privileged in the constitution of trans masculine subjectivity. The positioning of masculinity through dominant notions of men as 'strong', 'providers' and 'protectors' has been documented in the literature (Collison and Hearn, 2000). In this study, trans masculine individuals discussed their conception masculinity or being a man by drawing from popular ideas of men as fathers.

> I know that there's a way of being a man. I look up to my dad a lot, the type of man he is; like how secure my mom is around him. He's never had to be like an aggressive masculine man. I just wanna be a protector. He's not an emotional person though, well he doesn't talk about his emotions. I used to not talk about emotions also, but my mom as well is a person who just never speaks about her emotions, so I don't think that's gendered it's just how it is in our household – emotions are a big no. (Karabo, 32, trans man).

Karabo invokes the normative ideas of men as protectors (of women) and locates his identity as a man alongside this idea of masculinity and manhood. Karabo's articulation of the kind of masculinity he embodies departs however from the aggressive normative masculinity that is commonly articulated through patriarchal notions of masculinity.

> I look up to my father for the man I want to become. My father is a breadwinner; my mother never worked. My father has always been there no matter what. His children come first. My father is respectful; he respects my mother a lot. That's how I am; I respect my girlfriend so much. (Buhle, 23, trans man).

Tracing the implication of gendered affect illustrates the dominant discourses that shape the performance of trans masculinity. Gregg and Seigworth (2010) contend that to pay attention to

emotionality is to pay attention to those "visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing that not only drive our actions and shape our social relations but are also produced and shaped by the power of discourse". Gender is constituted through processes that are mediated by seemingly sedimented yet unstable discursive, material, temporal, corporeal and affective terrain (Bragg, Renold, Ringrose and Jackson, 2018:442). The statements above show how participants draw from normative ideas of fatherhood, care and emotionality to construct their trans masculinity as caring, respectful, and present. Ahmed (2004:4) poignantly states that "emotions operate to 'make' and 'shape' bodies as forms of action, which also involve orientations towards others". The participants in this study also drew from their experiences of the heteromasculine gaze and the discourses of toxic masculinity to reflect on how they envision their masculinity to be; articulating their masculinity from discourses of care, respect and of emotional awareness. The participants reflexively negotiated different positionality adjacent to masculinity and the problems they perceived/experienced with particular embodiments of masculinity. Holmes (2010:140) posits that reflexivity is "an emotional, embodied and cognitive process in which social actors have feelings about and try to understand and alter their lives in relation to their social and natural environment and others". Such processes involve relational struggles regarding how and why people might feel committed to a practice or role, where agency is understood as the mental capacity of how people can reflect on their sense of self in relation to their social contexts (Archer, 2003; Holmes, 2010). Dominant constructions of masculinity are typically associated with characteristics such as dominance, aggression, assertiveness, and self-assurance and these traits are highly visible in spaces where men want to appear or are expected to appear manly. In the narratives above there is a clear understanding of the emotionality of men or masculine identifying people. Further, the narratives show how the trans masculine individuals in this study subvert the (hetero) masculine expectations of men's emotions and grapple with the validity of their masculinity in line with an emotive aspect of their self-constitution. As such, emotions are constructed as integral to the embodiment of masculinity.

Affective (queer) spaces

In the book *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Jack Halberstam (2005:313) posits that "queer uses of time and space develop in opposition to the institutions for family, heterosexuality, and reproduction". The accounts below illustrate how trans masculinity is constructed within and through queer spaces.

> The one space that we went to, it was on women's day and it was about, a panel discussion on inclusivity…it was in Cape Town…there was a lot of females there, like femmes. But what made it really nice in the panel discussion there were two trans guys that spoke. And before that, I've never seen like a trans person in person. So that was really if anything I felt special and included, even if the people around me didn't know that I was trans. That was really nice. (Seth, 19, trans masculine)

Seth draws from the concepts of inclusivity and belonging to position his experience of trans masculine subjectivity in queer spaces. Then concepts of inclusivity and belonging construct queer spaces as spaces that congeal into the recognition of queer others and the 'feeling' of oneself as visible, and thus seen, validated and welcomed. Seth describes seeing other trans masculine individuals as evoking the feeling of joy in his constitution and the embodiment of masculinity. This construction speaks to the intersubjective aspect of affect in the constitution of gender embodiment. Gender norms construct and (re)produce bodies in relation to others; bodies shape and collide in the symbolic and physical space to produce affective dimensions of gender (~~Rubens, 2014).~~ The presence and visibility of other trans people in this space, as Seth's statement illustrates, invokes 'nice' feelings and underscores the construction of trans masculinity through the connectedness of trans identities. Spaces constructed as queer-inclusive are not all the time evacuated of the dominant hold of heteronormativity and cisnormativity.

> I'm very wary of those queer spaces because I felt a lot of rejection from these spaces…it was very exclusive like if you're a lesbian be a lesbian and if you're gay be gay, we don't like bisexuals and two butch women in a relationship was like that's so gay. (Mike*, 27, trans man)

Mike* frames his experience of queer spaces through the presence of dominant heteronormative ideals that shape queer imaginaries of gender and sexuality embodiment. Mike's* construction of queer spaces shows how he challenges the discourse of inclusivity in queer spaces, as spaces where (all) queer-identified individuals can be free to express themselves in any way, is still caught up in the discourse of cis-heteronormativity that sorts people into specific categories of gender expression, sexuality, desire, and pleasure.

Trans masculine participants do not only move in queer spaces but in spaces where the intersection of their gender embodiment with other parts of their identity is said to invoke different feelings of connectedness to space.

> I go to twelve-step meetings, and for a while, that has felt like a safe space. Like, the issues I'm dealing with like everyone there get those issues. But it has also felt very frustrating because they don't get trans issues. But now there's suddenly two trans people in the same meeting. It's very cool. It's just like you've got this connection, I guess. (Luke, 29, trans man)

Luke constructs his experiences of and feelings of connectedness to the discursive space of twelve-step meetings as entwined with the presence of others in the space that shares some part of his identity. In contrast, Luke frames the absence of individuals who can relate to transgender issues through the feeling of "frustration". Luke's statement shows how connectedness to others based on trans identity is constructed through shared experiences of being trans and navigating similar spaces that shape subjectivity.

> I was at ease (in the queer space), like you don't have to consistently check over your shoulder and tell people to like stop staring, so that's really nice…I think our biggest challenge was leaving...and going back to reality… Basically 18 hours or whatever and the next day having to go back to the real world and to people staring and stuff… it was difficult. (Seth, 19, trans masculine).

In summary, whereas queer spaces are constructed as central to the affirmation and validation of trans masculinity, queer spaces are also constructed through the discourse of cis heteronormativity where queer and trans masculine subjectivities are limited and restricted in the kinds of performances and embodiments that are acceptable and 'normal' to those spaces (Tucker, 2009).

Constituting masculinity in relationships

Romantic relationships and friendships were invoked by participants as spaces where they navigate masculinity and make sense of their trans masculinity. The narratives that follow illustrate the discourses trans masculinie individuals draw from to affirm and validate their masculinity. At the time of data collection, most of the trans masculine individuals in this study reported being in either queer or heterosexual romantic relationships.

> I'm in a heterosexual relationship with a cis gender woman…we just straight, both of us are straight, it's a woman and a guy in a relationship... That's how it is, it's just a relationship, just a normal relationship between a guy and a girl. That's how we treat ourselves and that's how we define ourselves. (Buhle, 23, trans man)

Buhle's emphasises his heterosexuality and constructs his relationship through the lens of heterosexual norms. Buhle invokes the ideas of "straight" emphasising that in his relationship "it is a woman and a guy" and emphases the "normal" positioning of his relationship. Buhle places great emphasis on heterosexuality and gender roles to affirm his heterosexual framing of his gender. Buhle's construction of his relationship invokes the heterosexual matrix that insists on the causal construction of sex, gender, and sexuality. The narrative illustrates the presence of clear distinctions in sexuality, gender norms and expectations. Invoking the narrative of a "normal" relationship which is used to juxtapose cis-heterosexual relationships as 'normal' or 'straight' against queer relationships which are not often constructed around ideas of "normal". In drawing on this heteronormative discourse, the participant has access to a positionality that constructs his relationship as normal and thus re-produces his gender in a normative and 'stable' sense. Some participant constructed gender roles through relationship based on what they deemed a person is able to do:

> With us, she opens the jars (laughs) the tools, the technical stuff…that's all her, so with us it's like, whatever you're good at that's your job, you do what you're good at. But shopping whooo I hate shopping, but it has nothing to do with my masculinity I just generally hate shopping as Karabo. (Karabo, 32, trans man)

Karabo positions his relationship as framed outside of normative gender roles. Karabo challenges the popular idea of shopping as gendered and emphasises that his aversion towards shopping is not gendered.

Some participants shared how their relationships are spaces of learning more about themselves, where their partners hold space for them to explore their identities.

> In previous relationships I found it difficult because I was still trying to navigate and trying to be conscious of who I am and I think my partners as well expected me to be a particular way and I wasn't that person and when I met my partner it was kind of like, kind of happy and ok to be just who I am and be comfortable to be who I am and allow me the space. (Henry, 28, non-binary)

Henry constructs relationships through the gender roles they were expected to perform in previous relationships. The affective-discursive space of a romantic relationship allows for the exploration of gendered embodiment that is evacuated of heteronormative expectations. Similarly,

Seth's narrative echoes the importance of having support in a romantic relationship crucial in the navigating of trans masculinity.

> I feel like I'm really lucky 'cos I see a lot of younger trans guys don't have a lot of support and I've got support that's with me like literally every single day which helps a lot um I'm really happy that like, I mean one of the main reasons I was ready to start T was that my support is definitely there and it's been there for a very long time I'm not scared that it's going to go away. So obviously when we started dating, I wasn't 100 percent sure if I was trans or not so I would say that I'm really lucky that she still finds me attractive…that sounds so bad (Seth, 19, trans masculine)

The construction of trans masculine subjectivity is also caught up in discourses of desirability and support (in the context of a relationship). 'Feeling' masculinity into existence in relationship spaces where; discourses of affect where affect is material – it is experienced through the body. As Seth's narrative shows; seeing other trans masculine individuals increased feeling of joy in his masculinity which speaks to the intersubjective aspect of affect. Gendered bodies are produced in relation to others; bodies shape and collide in the symbolic and physical space to produce affective dimensions of gender.

> Like I said in my case, I got really lucky to have so many people who are supportive of me, and like its genuine, you can see that people are genuinely happy because they can see that finally you're happy. I remember my partner, her name is (redacted), telling her mom, I didn't think she was gonna understand. She (Partner's mom) was like yaaa at least this will help with the depression, now I understand where the depression came from. Like, she just got it! I was so shocked…She (partner's mom) calls and she's like, "let me speak to my son", whenever she calls. (Karabo, 32, trans man)

Karabo cites the support he received from his family and friends and positions relationships as affirming and validating of his trans masculinity. Drawing from discourse of relationships illustrates the significance of supportive relationships in the constitution of trans masculinity. Research on trans people's supportive networks (Fuller and Riggs, 2018; Seibel et al., 2018) paint an unfortunate picture of lack of support and abuse by significant others. The participants in this study highlighted the importance of having a support network and illustrated how having supportive family and friends shapes their navigation of masculinity.

The narratives suggest that emotions and feelings, as embodied experiences, are central to the operation of masculinities as frameworks of power, not set against them. The participants cite the supportive networks in their lives that affirm their masculinity. Below, Mike* comments on how he navigated telling his family and friends about his identity:

> I told my best friend. He's family, right? I did not tell any of my family. I actually recently told my mother and not on the phone cos she'll freak out or make it about her and the next thing we're talking about something completely different. So, I told her, and she said ok well I support you, and I was like ok thank you. After that I was like she has no idea what I'm talking about. (Mike*, 28, trans man)

Most participants in this study emphasised the role of supportive networks in navigating trans masculine embodiment. Discourses of care were drawn upon to position the kinds of masculine embodiment that support, and care make possible. Further, relationships were constructed as safe spaces for trans masculine individuals to explore their identities and have space and the affirmation they need to feel good about themselves and to reinforce their identities. The discursive space of romantic and familial relationships were privileged as vital to the productive navigation and negotiation of masculine subjectivity. As Butler (2011) echoes, social support and networks of interdependency are essential in the ongoing work of constructing identity. Social support also was extended to the event of being with queer others in spaces that affirm and include queer identities. The evolution of queer spaces allows for the reproduction of queer selves at the backdrop of (cis-heteronormative) spaces that usually elide the existence of queer identities. Halberstam (2003:314) argues that "queer cultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of the conventional" narratives of cis-heterosexual narratives of identity. The participants' narratives show how these queer (subcultures) and spaces allow them to be visible to themselves and others at the people they know and feel themselves to be; this visibility is enabled by the construction of such spaces in opposition to cis-heteronormativity.

Summary

The discourses of patriarchy were showed to complicate trans masculine subjectivity; restricting the spaces in which trans masculinity can be navigated. Some participants challenged the discourses of patriarchal masculinity by insisting on moving into spaces that have been violent and harmful to them. The participants in this study also challenge dominant discourse of

masculinity as stoic. The participants negotiated masculine subjectivities that are cognisant of emotion and how they are received by others. In addition, the participants drew from their experiences of being socialised into cis-heteropatriarchal gender norms to reject violent masculine subjectivities and position their masculinity as caring.

My findings illustrate that trans masculinity is not a homogeneous category rather it is implicated in multiple discourses of gender. Trans masculinity is a configuration of practices and discourses that trans masculine individuals may embody in different ways. The participants in the study draw from different and sometimes conflicting discourses of masculinity to inform and shape their performance of masculinity. These competing knowledges of masculinity allow trans masculine embodiment to simultaneously source normative ideas of masculinity while troubling the very assumptions of those knowledges. For instance, the discussion on the physical embodiment of masculinity the individuals in this study articulate their embodied masculinity in ways that invoke the idea of masculinity as marked primarily by physicality. The body, in its varied manifestations, is apprehended and made sense of through layered experiences and ideas of what masculinity feels and looks like. The centrality of the lived body in the experience of gender embodiment is crucial in understanding both how gender discourses shapes perceptions of the body. Heteronormativity also affects the surfaces of bodies, which surface through impressions made by others. Compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980), shapes bodies by the assumption that a body 'must' orient itself towards some objects and not others, objects that are secured as ideal through the fantasy of difference (Ahmed, 2006a:145). In shaping one's approach to others, compulsory heterosexuality also shapes one's own body, as a congealed history of past approaches (Ahmed, 2006a:145). In this study non-binary trans masculine participants did not reduce masculinity to their bodies and instead moved away from a conception of masculinity as embedded in the body. For the trans men in this study, achieving a masculine identity entails the repeated repudiation of femininity by laying claim to muscular and athletic bodies as a marker of masculinity. Trans masculinity is also conceived through medical transitioning where participants emphasise the need to undergo testosterone therapy to bring their bodies closer to a masculine appearance that conforms to how cisgender males look like. The masculinisation of the body intersects with the need to build a better relationship with the body and to feel comfortable in their bodies. Adherence to particular dominant knowledges about gender and sexuality shape the kinds of masculine embodiment that the trans masculine individuals in this study embody. For instance,

in articulating the decision to transition, some of the participants highlighted the stereotypical imaginaries of masculinity or what a man looks like, flat chested, muscular, and unfeminine. There was a clear move away from styles or embodiments that could be coded as feminine. Kimmel (2008) argued that a central organising principle of dominant cultural definitions of masculinity is fear of being seen as 'not a real man', especially by other men. In the case of the trans masculine individuals in this study ensuring they are perceived as the masculine men they know themselves to be, the fear and anxiety about being seen in or associated with anything feminine. In some way, constructing masculinity for some trans masculine individuals relies on distancing themselves from anything that can be construed as feminine. This sentiment was common among individuals who identify as trans men, whereas the non-binary participants narrated an indifference to dominant gender norms, citing the desire to present their gender in whatever way feels comfortable for them and noting that this might change from time to time.

5. Conclusion: Parting Insights

In this thesis, I explored how the discourses of gender influence and shape how trans masculine individuals understand and perform masculinity. To explore this question, I considered how trans masculine individuals understand and perform gender and how they navigate and negotiate trans masculinity. Through Foucauldian discourse analysis, I traced the dominant discourses that trans masculine individuals draw from to affirm, challenged, or reject particular masculine subject positions. My study found that trans masculinity is constituted through three dominant discourses of gender that include, (i) a discourse of 'gender-specific bodies'; (ii) a discourse of medical transitioning, and, (iii) a discourse of counter-patriarchal masculinity. Below I share four important insights from this study.

Firstly, in this study, I found that trans masculine people flexibly deploy competing discourses of gender to make sense of their gender. Most participants drew from the discourse of gender-specific bodies to assume privileged subject positions within the gender binary. The participants in this study reported a persistent felt embodiment of their gender that is contradicted by their bodily appearance. The most salient finding suggests that the discourse of gender-specific bodies allows trans masculine individuals to claim a 'natural' gender embodiment that is constructed as an inherently felt gender embodiment while articulating the body 'within-which' their gender is contained as "wrong", and thus it can be changed. Importantly, constructing trans masculinity within the gender-specific body idea allows trans masculine individuals to make sense of wanting to 'change' their 'bodily' gender to reconcile felt gender embodiment with how the body appears. Trans masculine individuals privileged the idea of a body that is visibly male and positioned masculine bodies as devoid of cultural markers of femininity.

Secondly, the discourse of medical transitioning was disproportionately influential in the construction of masculine embodiments due to its 'expert' and authoritative knowledges on trans identity. Testosterone therapy allows trans masculine individuals to claim masculine subject positions that conform to dominant cultural notions of how 'men' ought to look. Most participants desired to undergo testosterone therapy and to have chest reconstruction surgery in order to be fully comfortable and present in their bodies. Undergoing chest reconstruction surgery brought feelings of comfort and the relief of finally being in the "right" body. Accordingly, drawing from this discourse allows trans masculine individuals to embody a visibly masculine body. The discursive centralisation of transitioning and masculinising the body in trans masculine accounts

restricts the possibilities for other legitimate forms of trans masculine embodiment. It is important to note that while this study only focuses on trans men and non-binary trans masculinity, it became clear that trans masculinity is performed in complex and variable ways that are continually shifting. Although trans masculine individuals undergo a medical transition to masculinise their body, this process does not foreclose the possibility of experiencing or desiring other forms of gender expression. For instance, some participants expressed their desire to express their gender in feminine ways now that they have medically transitioned. These shifts in gender expression also complicate the idea of transitioning as moving from one gender identity and expression to another. This insight challenges the medical discourse of transgender identity that constructs trans men/masculinity through standardised practices that reinforce the idea of muscular embodiments of masculinity. A contrary discourse of 'masculinities without men', where masculinity is invoked and performed outside the logic of being a man, was attractive to non-binary trans masculine individuals, who underwent testosterone, positioned themselves outside of binary expressions of masculinity. Importantly, non-binary participants explicitly emphasise the notion of self-determination in defining and delineating the contours of their gender embodiment and make a claim to masculine embodiments that are fluid and not contingent on the body and its appearance. The rejection of binary masculinity makes available alternate ways of embodying and performing masculinity.

Third, patriarchal discourses of masculinity complicate trans masculine individuals' navigation of public spaces. For the most part, binary leaning trans masculine individuals did not report experiencing difficulty navigating public spaces. Nevertheless, trans masculine embodiments that deviate from the patriarchal masculine norms are subject to harassment and denigration in public spaces. For some participants, the experience of harassment forced them to consider medically transitioning, even though the challenge and rejected the discourse of the body as inherently gendered. The weight of patriarchal norms inhibits the visibility of non-binary, trans masculine subjectivities in public spaces. Interestingly, it is not only public spaces that circumscribe the navigation and performance of trans masculinity. The study found that workspaces too are constructed as spaces where trans masculinity is subsumed under the gaze of cis-heterosexual masculinities and expected to conform to that norm to prove their masculinity/manhood. While it is significant that trans masculinity makes a claim to and is visible

in public spaces the personal cost attached to claiming specific public spaces is higher than the benefit of occupying the often violent and derisive public spaces.

Fourth and finally, another valuable insight from this study concerns the importance of emotional reflexivity to navigate patterns of relating that do not reproduce masculinity through emotional incapacity. Trans masculine individuals engage emotional reflexivity, intentionally exploring and expressing feelings, in positioning their masculinity as caring and affective. The study showed how emotional reflexivity is engaged to challenge and to reject dominant patriarchal configurations of masculinity. While most participants expressed and insisted on showing and expressing emotion, some worried about the legitimacy of their masculinity and the degree to which they can express emotions. Emotionally reflexive trans masculinities carve out and strengthen the expression of emotion through romantic relationships and friendships.

Implications and recommendations

As indicated in the introduction to this study, understandings and performances of gender are not fixed or coherent. As such, the articulations of masculinities that do not rely on normative understandings of masculinity, such non-binary masculinity, open up new areas for analysis and debate concerning understandings of masculinity, gender, and sexuality. This is not to add new types or kinds of masculinity but to challenge the epistemology of masculinity, how masculinity is conceptualised and understood. The challenge of future work on trans masculinity is to develop, refine and integrate theoretical frameworks and methodologies that allow more complex accounts, conceptualisations, and analyses of masculinity. It is also crucial to recognise that we might observe changes in the definition of trans masculinity as more empirical work is done and more enunciations unravel that bring challenges to definitions at different levels of analyses.

Further, there is an urgent need for more research that explores counter-/antinormative masculine subjectivity, particularly trans-masculinity. There is a need to decentre the notion of masculinity as a cis-gender male prerogative to open up levels of analyses that enrich our understanding of masculinity, and gender in its fluid, fragmentary and context-based modes. Methodologically, queer work on masculinities needs to trouble the overreliance on specific methodologies that may truncate the level of analysis queer can reach. An exploration of interdisciplinary methods to shift the transgender research, particularly in South Africa, from the confines of psychology and medical research to other disciplines to avoid a reification of a singular narrative of trans that runs the risk of pathologising trans identities.

Limitations

Although I have explored the discourses that represent, construct, and legitimate trans masculinity, these do not constitute the exclusive discourses trans masculinity is constructed from. Nevertheless, they are some of the prevalent discourses implicated in trans masculine subjectivity. As common in qualitative research, this study has a small sample, and the participants were recruited from one particular location, and its results may not be generalisable to a larger population of trans masculine people. The results arrived at in this study may differ from the general trans masculine population from different socio-political and geographical positioning. This study was reasonably exploratory; the methodology followed in this study was implemented cautiously and guided by theoretical implications and available literature on trans identity in South Africa. As such, the study included a small sample and utilised a single data collection strategy.

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